

# HER LITTLE KINGDOM

BY

**LAURA A. BARTER-SNOW**

Author of "Twixt Altar and Plough," "Eldwyth's Choice," etc.

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"BY THE WAY, I HEARD FROM EDDLEWOOD," OBSERVED IONE,  
DRAWING A LETTER FROM HER POCKET

(Page 258)

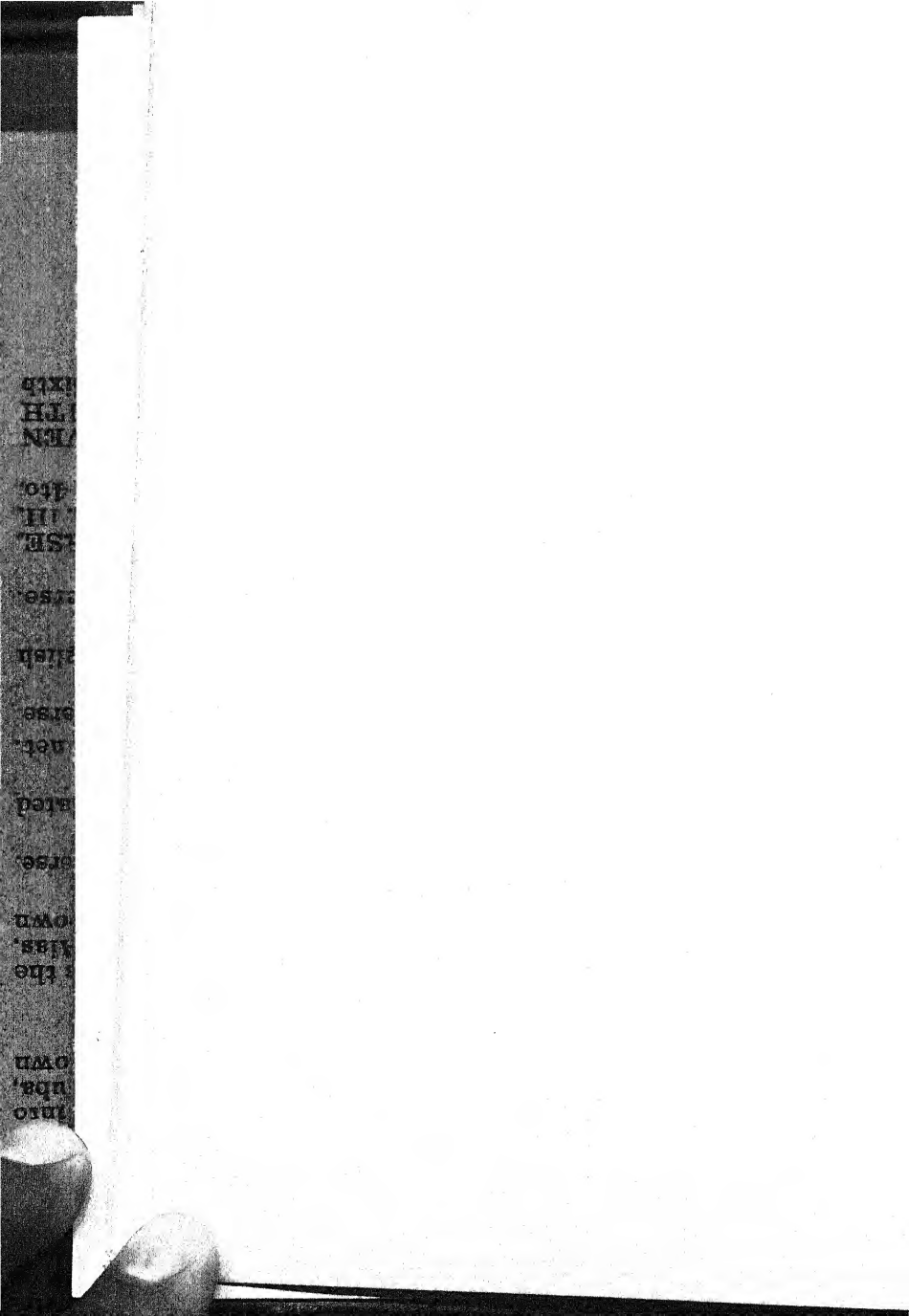


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Made and Printed in Great Britain

To  
The dear Cousins  
at  
Clonskeagh Castle  
I dedicate  
this Book



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# Her Little Kingdom

## CHAPTER I

### YESTERDAY

“With gentle swiftness lead me on,  
Dear God! to see thy face;  
And meanwhile in my narrow heart,  
Oh, make Thyself more space.”—FABER.

IT was a matter of distinct annoyance to Gwynneth Owen that when Doctor Evan Hughes came to see her aunt, she should be excluded from the interview. What mattered it to her that from her seat in the verandah her eye wandered over a rarely beautiful landscape, a rock-bordered bay, bright with golden sand when the tide was out, revealing banks of rich brown seaweed, with here and there particles of vivid green?

On this particular autumn evening, however, the tide was in, and the sun was sinking into the distant sea like a ball of fire, lighting up the few soft clouds on the horizon with flashes of

crimson and gold, and bathing the whole village of Cemaes in waves of glory.

Miss Owen's house faced the sunset, its pretty quaint structure attracting the notice of many a passer-by as he trudged along the dusty high road which led from Amlwch to the old-world village of Cemaes Bay.

Thank God there are still some spots on this fair earth undesecrated by the rough and vulgar tread of the madding crowd, where the discordant notes of the barrel-organ have not penetrated, and motor-cars are seldom seen! Such was Cemaes, and long may it continue in its native simplicity and beauty. But much as Gwynneth loved the little village, remembering no other home, yet to-night she had no eye for its picturesqueness, for her heart was sore—Evan Hughes was with her aunt, and she was shut out from the conference.

She sat on a low seat in the verandah, her face turned towards the glowing west, and her dark eyes fixed on the calm sea. But her heart was busy with eager questionings. Was her aunt worse? Why had Hugh come so often lately? And why did he stay so long and bring papers with him? Why had Nellie Griffiths and Amos Williams been called in one day? Why——?

“Gwynneth!”

She had been so deep in thought over her various questions that she had not heard the French window open behind her, and now Evan Hughes stood beside her, a world of sympathy in his kindly face.

But Gwynneth did not notice it. She still felt badly used and showed it.

"Well?" she said crossly.

He stooped, and laid his hand gently on her arm. "Walk down to the gate with me," he said softly.

Gwynneth rose reluctantly, and together they made their way down the little gravel path, but when they reached the gate the doctor paused. There was a troubled expression on his face, which the girl would not have failed to notice had not her eyes been fixed on a little sailing-boat entering the harbour, and in her heart an unuttered grievance.

He leaned over the gate and waited.

"Well," she remarked at length, "what did you bring me here for? I'm afraid your practice is not increasing, Evan, if you can give each of your patients an hour, such as you have been giving my aunt almost daily. More like an hour and a half to-day it has been."

There was an angry defiance in her tone, and she still gazed out to sea.

"Gwynneth!"

The tone of his voice startled her, and she turned round. Then her face changed as her eyes met his, and she seized his arm. "Evan, what is the matter? Your face is quite white. Aunty is not—not——"

He took her hand in his great strong one. How often he had held it in bygone days!—ever since as a tiny baby of a few months old she had come to live with her aunt. His father (who had died only two years previous to the opening of my story) had been local doctor at the little village, and Evan was his only child, a fine strong rollicking schoolboy of ten years when he first saw Gwynneth. The tiny morsel of humanity had somehow taken his fancy, and as his mother was a constant visitor at Miss Owen's house, the children saw a good deal of each other as the years went by. He had unconsciously got into the habit of calling Miss Owen by the familiar name of Aunty, too, by hearing the word so often fall from Gwynneth's lips, and truly she had been as an aunt and more to him, when his mother died, opening wide, not only the door of her house, but also of her heart, to the lonely lad.

All through his school days and college course she had never failed to send him a weekly letter. Full well she knew the busy doctor had little time to correspond with his son, and none rejoiced more than she when his college days

were over, and he took up his abode once more with his father, ready to help him in his work, and soon won the confidence and respect of both rich and poor.

"The old doctor's aye good, but Mr. Evan he be a sight quicker, and he have new ways o' doing things. Indeed, yes, Cemaes is lucky, it is, in having him."

Thus spoke the villagers, and when the old man passed away what more natural than that his son should slip into his shoes?

Evan mourned for his father, but another trouble overshadowed him. His quick eye was not slow to detect a gradual but very real change in his old friend Miss Owen. Her steps grew slower, her cheeks lost their colour, and lines of pain left their mark round her mouth. She never spoke of it to him, but he felt sure there was something wrong; so one day, being alone with her, he broached the subject, and found his fears had been only too well founded, and that his old friend was suffering from an incurable disease. He urged an operation, but she shook her head.

"It would be no good, Evan. I did not want to trouble you, dear boy; you have had sorrow enough of your own to bear. There, don't shake your head. I have done more than you think. I have consulted a specialist. Some months ago

there was an excursion to Chester, and I took advantage of it, and, as you may remember, Gwynneth and I went off together. How little you thought when you were chaffing us the following day about our gallivanting propensities, as you were pleased to call them, that we were on a far different errand. I——”

“Then Gwynneth knows about it?” he broke in.

“No, Gwynneth knows nothing. I left her in Chester Cathedral, telling her I had business to see to, and then I called on the doctor and found my fears were only too true. My mother died of the same complaint, Evan, and he assured me an operation was an impossibility.”

The young man groaned. His parents dead, and this old and valued friend dying, what had he to live for? Life looked very dark to Evan Hughes at that moment. But that had all taken place eighteen months before, and though Miss Owen grew weaker daily, she was still with them. Strangely enough Gwynneth never seemed to realize her aunt's condition. Her growing weakness she always put down to old age, little dreaming of the hours of intense suffering borne by the patient invalid. Life was all brightness and sunshine to the fair young girl of nineteen; she loved her aunt, and her cosy little nest by the sea—the sea, with its ever

varying aspect of storm and calm, of bright sparkling blue, or dull leaden grey. Cemaes was Gwynneth's world; she knew little beyond it, and though at times a longing would seize her to wander forth and see somewhat of the great unknown beyond, she invariably returned to her old situation of quiet content in her village bower. We left her looking with frightened eyes into those of the young doctor.

"Gwynneth," he repeated, still holding her hand, "I want you to be strong and brave. I have something to tell you that I think you should know, and I want to spare her. Come, little woman, I know I can trust you."

In a moment all her feelings of anger and resentment had fled, and looking into his face the girl made a strong effort and pulled herself together. In a flash she seemed to see it all.

"Evan, Auntie is very ill, perhaps dying. Tell me the truth, tell me everything. See, I am quite strong now." She drew herself up and waited.

"Yes, *merch i*,"\* he answered, using the endearing word which so often had fallen from his lips in the old days. "I knew I could trust you. Yes, Gwynneth, the dear Auntie is slipping away from us. I told her I would tell you, that it was only right you should know, because—because she won't be here much longer."

\* "My lass."



The girl's face grew deadly pale, and for a moment he feared she was going to faint. But she only gave a little shiver, and then shook herself. She remained silent a moment, and then asked suddenly :

"How long have you known this, Evan ?"

"What ? Of her illness ? More than a year. She has been incurable for some time."

Incurable—more than a year! The words seemed to burn themselves into her very soul. Where had been her eyes and powers of observation ? She hid her face in her hands as a groan escaped her.

"Come, Gwynneth, this will never do," and Evan tried, but ineffectually, to regain possession of her hand. "You must not give way, child ; for her sake you must try to bear it bravely."

But there was no response, the girl stood as if turned to stone.

Away in the west the sun was sinking in exquisite splendour into the sea, leaving a long pathway of glory on the shimmering waters. Up from the beach came the soft murmur of the waves upon the shore, and a few curlews gave forth their mournful notes on the still air.

At another time Gwynneth would have stood for an hour, leaning over the little rustic gate and drinking in all the beauty around her, but to-night the heavens were as brass, a thick

darkness seemed to have suddenly fallen and engulfed her.

Evan stood and waited. He had learned to wait for many things in his life, and how deeply he was sharing in her grief Gwynneth did not realize at the time. Presently she gave another little shiver and looked up. How white and drawn her face had become during the last few minutes, and there was a dull despair in her tearless eyes.

"It is getting late," she remarked, her eyes resting on the sinking sun. "I ought to go in, but—but—I don't think I *can* go to her yet; I might break down, and that would do her harm."

"Yes, avoid all excitement, but she is wonderfully calm. Do you know, Gwynneth, I would give anything to have the pluck and calmness Auntie has?"

Gwynneth's eyes opened wide. "*You*, Evan!" she exclaimed; "why, I thought men were always braver than women. At least, they say so."

"I'm afraid '*they say*' a good deal more than their prayers," he responded with a short laugh. "But it takes far more pluck and backbone to face long months of agony and sickness for which you know there is no cure, than it does to face death in a moment of excitement and, so to speak, have done with it. Fact is, Gwyn, Auntie

has a secret source of strength; her religion makes a fellow think *she lives it*, and I never meet her but, God knows, I want to be a better man."

He stopped abruptly, and leaned both his arms on the gate.

Gwynneth looked at him wonderingly, and then softly touched his arm.

"I'm so glad; it is just what she would wish. I have often heard her say it is not so much what we say as what we are that tells, and Aunty herself is all that is true, and noble, and beautiful, and good. I want to be like her, Evan; but you—you don't want anything different? You have always been good and brave, and everything that's right in a man. I don't believe Aunty loves any one as she does you, except me."

He turned on her with a smile.

"Love is often blind, *merch i*," he observed, using once more the familiar Welsh expression; "and I value Aunty's love more than I can say. What has she not been to me!" he exclaimed passionately. "Where should I have been since my mother died but for her sympathy and care? Your house has been more of a home to me than my own. What should I have done through the long winter evenings when I was home for my holidays, and father off on his rounds, if I had

not had the Nest to come to? I verily believe I'd have gone to the dogs as many another poor fellow has done, but that the thought of you and Auntie checked me. That school at Cardiff was a beastly hole, but my father never would believe it, and so I had to go through the mill, and grin and bear it. But it's been the ruin of more than one lad, and I'm right glad it came to smash. It's hard sometimes to believe in the good when you remember some of the beings I've come across in my life. At thirty a fellow's not very old, to be sure, but old enough to have learned a fairish bit of good and evil, and I believe the influence of good women has more to do in keeping the world straight than any one knows. Be a good woman, Gwynneth," he added earnestly, and there was a quiver in his voice. "Yes, be good, *merch i*, and keep up bravely, for the dear Auntie's sake. *Nos da.*" \*

The next moment he was gone, swiftly making his way down the narrow steep pathway which led to the high road, which lay white and winding at the foot of the hill, upon which the Nest stood. Gwynneth watched him. She had never heard him speak like this before, and that the big, tall man, so strong and wise, should have been so near tears, moved her strangely.

She had caught a glimpse of the inner man of

\* "Good night."

Evan Hughes that night. For fully a quarter of an hour the girl stood by the rustic fence, facing the glowing west. Slowly, silently the sun sank to rest, and longer shadows began to fall around her. The tide was going out, and the gentle swish of the waves grew fainter and fainter, while the sands, fair and golden by day, now looked black in the gathering twilight. The rocky cliffs stood out black against the glowing sky, like two great pillars guarding the little bay on either side. The calm beauty of the surroundings soothed her, and slowly, very slowly, the long-pent-up tears began to fall, and once her floodgates were open, they had their way, until the girl's slender form shook with the storm that was sweeping over her.

But by and by she grew calmer. Had not Evan bidden her be brave, and would she not have to face her aunt, when her red eyelids would tell their own tale? So choking back her sobs, she rose from the grassy bank upon which she had thrown herself and began slowly making her way to the house.

Suddenly she stopped, as the sound of a heavy footstep fell on her ear, and presently out of the gloom emerged the form of old Matti, come in search of her young mistress.

As far back as Gwynneth could remember, Matti had been her nurse, cook, general servant,

friend, and general factotum of the establishment. It was in Matti's strong arms she had reposed as an infant, and from Matti's knee to her aunt's her first steps had been taken. It was Matti who had pulled her out of the tide, when in a fit of disobedience she had insisted in playing in Dan Griffith's boat and overbalanced herself. It was Matti who had faced Stiven the 'Mill's bull, when it ran after her in the Point Field, opening her umbrella in his face, and making it retrace its steps. It was to Matti's arms she had usually flown with her childlike woes, and never had she known the faithful-hearted old friend to fail.

"There's glad I am to see you, Gwynneth *fâch!*" exclaimed the old woman, as the girl's figure loomed up before her. "It's too late, it is, for you to be out without a cloak or hat, and the dew falling fit to drown you. *Dewch mewn! dewch mewn!*" \* 'tis your supper you'll be needing, and the mishtress will be wanting you."

"I'm coming, Matti," replied Gwynneth, hurriedly running past her towards the house. At the threshold she paused, and called out:

"Tell Aunty I'll be down in a minute," and then she fled through the tiny hall and up the staircase to her own room. Hastily pouring some water into a basin, she commenced vigour-

\* "Come in! come in!"

ously bathing her swollen eyelids, and then slowly descended to the drawing-room, where she well knew she would find her aunt.

"She's a wild thing," murmured old Matti as she stumbled back to the house; "but she's only a child. *Dir anwl!*\* We can't put old heads on young shoulders. 'Tis long she is seeing the trouble that's hanging over her; but time enough, no need to choke the world with sorrows. They come fast enough." And with a sigh, and wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, Matti entered her cosy kitchen and commenced preparations for the simple supper of her beloved mistress and Gwynneth.

\* "Dear! dear!"



## CHAPTER II

### 'THE SEA, THE SEA, THE OPEN SEA!'

"The friends who leave us do not feel the sorrow  
Of parting, as we feel it who must stay  
Lamenting day by day,  
And knowing when we wake upon the morrow,  
We shall not find in its accustomed place  
The one beloved face."—LONGFELLOW.

"GWYNNETH, my darling!"

Two white hands, thin and weakly, were held out towards the girl as she entered the room.

No need for Aunt Mary to ask if Gwynneth knew; the girl's pale face and trembling lips, which she tried so hard to keep steady, told their own tale, and she could only clasp the worn hands in her own, and let herself be drawn into the loving embrace. No tears came this time, though it was hard work to keep them back with those loving arms holding her fast, arms that she knew full well might lose their hold at any time, and then——? Ah, she could not yet face the *then*.

They said nothing, that girl-woman and the older one, both so dear to one another, feeling

how small the world would be were the other to go out of it. And the gentle wings of the twilight folded them round, and the shadows fell, and the stars came out in the darkening sky, and still they never moved, save that the hands of the elder woman now and then stroked the girl's soft curls, and her lips moved in silent prayer.

At length the heavy tread of Matti betokened the arrival of the supper tray, so with a parting embrace Gwynneth rose and began to clear a small table which stood beside her aunt's couch, preparatory to Matti's entrance.

But little supper either of them ate that night. It is true that they both made a pretence of taking a meal, but Matti's soul groaned over the untasted dainties which she bore away when it was over, and left them again in solitude. Once Gwynneth had tried to speak and bravely face the subject which lay so heavy on their hearts, but her aunt had stopped her with a quiet :

"Not to-night, my darling ; another time we will have our talk. To-night I want music ; play to me."

So Gwynneth had risen, and with tear-dimmed eyes taken her treasured violin from its case. After carefully tuning the instrument, she lowered the lamp till the room was almost in total darkness, then pushed aside the curtains which Matti had so carefully pulled across the

long low window, and a flood of moonlight entered the room.

Miss Owen gave a sigh of contentment. Instinctively Gwynneth began softly to play "Nazareth," the soft, slow murmur of the melody falling like a soothing balm on both her own and her aunt's heart. She felt almost sorry to leave it and dash into a brighter sparkling air, but that, too, had its message, and a song of hope sprang up in her heart as she continued, growing deeper and more triumphant every moment. The long hours of patient practice were bearing fruit, and as the last quivering notes died away and she saw in the moonlight the look of quiet rest on her aunt's face, she had her reward.

A pause, and then old Welsh melodies began to glide from the instrument—melodies her music-loving soul had long loved, which she had picked up here and there, and made her own. She knew her aunt loved them too, and then, when an hour had glided by and the moonlight told her it was time for slumber, the sweet soothing notes of "Abide with me" came as a closing benediction, falling with refreshing comfort on the hearts of both player and listener, and also on two other hearts besides, one, that of a strong man, tramping home from visiting a sick man up in the hills, who stood to listen in

the moonlight, lifting his hat reverently and musing as he passed to his lonely hearth : " The child has found comfort." The other, that of an old woman, sitting over the dying embers of her kitchen fire and rocking herself to and fro in her deep grief. Matti, friend and family counsellor, knew her loved mistress was dying, and the knowledge was breaking her heart, but the old hymn tune did its work, and when, half an hour later, she stumbled up to bed, peace, too, reigned in her heart.

The morning broke with rare sweetness over the little bay, more like spring than autumn, and when, after breakfast, Gwynneth stood outside in the garden plucking a few late roses and sweet peas, she was startled by hearing the cheery tones of Doctor Evan's voice, as he sprang up the rocky footpath from the beach.

" Good morning, Gwynneth," he cried. " What a glorious morning ! How is Auntie to-day ? "

" Quite bright, Evan. I think the beauty of the morning has made her feel stronger, and she slept well, she says."

" Ah, that is good, for I want to tempt her out for a sail. The wind is just right, and I am free for a bit to-day, and believe an expedition to the Skerries would do her real good. Go and ask her, will you ? "

" I'll tell her her medical adviser strongly



be stroked tenderly back into place by the caressing hand of the aunt, who sat and watched her.

"Aunt Mary, this spree is doing you real good," remarked Evan, with a smile, as he noted the faint tinge of colour which had come into the cheeks of his patient. "Don't you think so?"

"Yes, dear boy, I believe you are right. The sea always did set me up. Do you remember that stormy day we came just along this track because you were bent on showing us the Skerries in, what you termed, their glory?"

"Yes, I remember; and how you and I were the only ones who enjoyed ourselves. Gwyn, there, was as sick as she could be, and——"

"Oh, do stop!" exclaimed Gwynneth. "I hate to think of that day, it all seems like a hideous nightmare. Whatever possessed you to take us out I never could imagine, and I consider I showed very little common sense in even going."

"Well, well, it's past and gone now," laughed the young man good-humouredly. "Sometimes the strongest of us can't stand the sea, you know, Gwen. Now suppose you hunt up that hamper of good things I saw Matti pack. Aunt Mary won't say 'no' to its contents, I reckon, and as for me, why, I'm as hungry as a hunter."

Gwynneth sprang to her feet. To unpack and lay out the various delicacies of Matti's

forethought was just in her line, and before long a tempting little meal was spread before them, to which even Aunt Mary did justice.

The afternoon was still early when the little craft made her way back into the harbour, and with strong steady hands Evan helped Miss Owen out of the boat and up the cliffs and narrow footpath which led up from the beach to her abode.

Having seen her safely deposited on the sofa in the drawing-room, preparatory to a nap, and waved a farewell to Gwynneth, he sprang up the cliff side and went off at a swinging pace to visit some of his patients.

And the girl, with a book in her hand, sat in the verandah, sometimes reading and sometimes dreaming, until Matti's voice aroused her by telling her her aunt was awake, and tea ready.

The news of the previous evening seemed like a hideous nightmare, a bad dream, from which she would presently awake to find her aunt full of health and strength, and life's pathway still strewn with rose-leaves.

As she entered the room and met Miss Owen's sweet smile, and noted the flush on her cheek, her heart gave a bound. Surely this was the beginning of better things. With such a colour Aunt Mary could not be so ill, and as she gave her a warm kiss, she exclaimed :



"Oh, Aunt, you are looking so much better! That sail has done you all the good in the world. How I wish Evan could take us out every day. I believe he'd try to manage it if he knew how much you enjoyed it, and how much good it has done you."

"Evan is a dear kind boy," responded Miss Owen, "but duty must come before pleasure. I fear his practice would suffer were he to go in for sailing every day. Besides, to-day is exceptionally fine, childie; we must not expect many more such remnants of summer in October."

"Yes, I suppose it's true," sighed Gwynneth, as she began to pour out the tea and brought a fragrant cup over to the little table by her aunt's side, with just the amount of toast she knew she liked.

"I know the summer is gone," she continued, "and I hate to think of it. I do love the spring and summer so much, Aunt Mary, but the autumn and winter here are so rough and stormy; sometimes I wish those seasons would never come. There are always wrecks and catastrophes of some kind or another."

"Yes, child, it's true; but we would not value the beauties of spring nor the warmth of summer half as much as we do, if we had not a taste of desolation and bareness and cold before-

"THE SEA, THE SEA, THE OPEN SEA!" 31  
hand. We learn the value of things by contrasts."

"Perhaps so," observed Gwynneth musingly, while her aunt lay and pondered her own words. Would not "the rest that remaineth for the people of God" be all the sweeter, because her feet had grown so weary on life's highway, and extreme pain had been her companion for so long?

She had shrunk from speaking of the coming separation to the child, but felt she must not delay much longer. The flushed face and seeming renewal of strength, which had deceived Gwynneth, did not deceive her. Full well she knew that she stood on the borderland, and that at any time she might hear the welcome words: "The Master is come, and calleth for thee."

To her those words would be music itself. He had left her just long enough on earth for her to be glad to leave it for a better home. Miss Owen breathed a prayer for help, and lay and watched the girl who had known no other home but hers, and to whom she had never disclosed her family history. The time had come for her to hear it. If she did not open the volume for her, there was no one else to do so, therefore she nerved herself for her task. With some natures, as life goes on it becomes positive

pain to lift the veil from the past, no matter whether it has been joyous or sad, it is so intermingled with the touches of vanished hands and the sound of voices that are still. Miss Owen was one of these sensitive souls, and Gwynneth never knew what the recital of that old tale cost her that autumn evening.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LIFTED VEIL

"There is a comfort in the strength of love ;  
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else  
Would upset the brain, or break the heart."

WORDSWORTH.

"Gwynneth," said Miss Owen suddenly, as, the tea-things having been cleared away, the girl had settled herself in a comfortable chair close to her aunt's couch, and taken up a book, "I want to tell you the story of a girl who lived in the old village I came from ; I think it would interest you."

Gwynneth looked up.

"Oh, thank you, Aunt Mary, I'd love to hear it ; I know so little about Rhuthyn. But are you sure it will not tire you to talk ? Had I not better go on with 'Auld Bob' ? You enjoyed hearing it read aloud."

"Not to-day, my darling ; I feel I would rather talk, and, as you say, you know so little about my old home, I want you to know more now."

There was an unusual tenderness in her voice, so Gwen put aside the book, and, taking up some needlework, prepared to listen.

"There now, Aunt, I'm quite settled and all attention. Who was this girl? I suppose you knew her?"

"Yes, I knew her well, and loved her dearly. She was another Gwynneth, and——"

"And what, Aunt?"

"And sometimes you remind me very much of her."

"Do I?" laughed the girl. "Well, I hope she was nice. I shouldn't like to remind you of any one who was not!"

"She was very sweet," observed Miss Owen gently, "but her life was a sad one, in some respects. However, I will begin from the beginning, and leave you to judge for yourself."

She paused, and took one longing gaze at the radiant sunset, which was flooding sea and land with glory, then she began:

"Gwynneth's father was a clergyman. A Welshman by birth and extraction, he had married a Cornish girl, and I have heard people say that no fairer woman than Mary Trevelyan ever walked the streets of Rhuthyn. It was a queer little out-of-the-world village (you will not remember it), eight miles from a railway station, and its chief beauty lay in the glorious

mountains which shut it in, and the peaceful river which flowed at their foot. Few visitors found their way there, as the roads were not good, and the days of cycles and motors had not yet come. Occasionally an artist or some enthusiastic fisherman, in the course of his wanderings, passed through, but generally speaking that was all.

"For many years the minister had only one child, a daughter and his firstborn. Several others had followed her, but none had lived, until at last when this girl was about seventeen years of age, a little sister came to gladden the home, whom they called Gwynneth, but her advent was the signal for her mother's departure, and both sisters were left motherless."

Again the speaker paused. Gwynneth had taken up a piece of work, but as her interest in the story deepened, it had fallen into her lap, and she sat with clasped hands, her eyes riveted on her aunt.

"Their father was a quiet thoughtful man, a deep thinker and much wedded to his books; not that he possessed many, his means were very small, but those he did possess were read and re-read, until he had made them part of himself. His eldest daughter——"

"What was her name?" demanded Gwynneth suddenly, breaking into the narrative.

Miss Owen hesitated.

"Gwynneth always called her Sissy," she replied slowly, as if the name had grown strange to her ears, "but her father called her Gem (the speaker's lips trembled as she uttered the word). He had a quaint humour about him, and loved to think of his children as jewels entrusted to him by his heavenly Father, and hereafter to be set in the Saviour's crown. To each child he had given some such pet name, and his baby he called Ruby, the blood-red stone of suffering, which had cost him his idolized wife.

"But I was going to say Gem, or Sissy, whichever you like to call her——"

"I like Gem best," once more interrupted Gwynneth, "it's uncommon. But please go on. What about her?"

"She, like her father, devoured books, and the ambition of her life was to be a teacher. He encouraged her in this, and they were never so happy as when in each other's company. But the coming of baby Gwynneth made a great difference. With her dying breath their mother had committed her baby to the elder sister's care, bidding her be a true mother to her and never let her, if possible, feel the loss of her own mother. With trembling lips Gem promised to do all she could for her little sister, and God knows she tried hard to keep it. From

that day the baby became the centre of her thoughts and cares. She did everything for the child, and both she and her father watched her with joy and pride as she grew into childhood, and later into womanhood. The sisters were absolute contrasts, and Gwynneth was always the favourite, which was natural, seeing how bright and pretty she was, and she had such sparkling wit and humour. Gem was quiet and thoughtful, not particularly good-looking, with a strong will, and given to violent likes and dislikes. Where she loved she did so passionately, where she hated, she——”

“She what?” asked Gwynneth.

“Well, dear, I fear she hated passionately, too.”

“But I thought she was a clergyman’s daughter?” observed the girl.

“True, but that fact could not regenerate her. Clergy and their families are just as human and full of faults as others, only the world is apt to put them on pedestals and think they come of a different stock. I have often wondered, Gwen, why the most worldly girls will do their utmost to win the affections of a minister of the Gospel. Girls who delight in every kind of worldly amusement, and who never seem to give a thought to the things of God, I have known take up district visiting and other church



work, for no other reason than that it gave them an opportunity of meeting more often the unmarried clergy of the parish."

"Oh, Aunt, that does sound hard!" cried Gwynneth. "Perhaps they really wanted to help and to get help."

"Well, dear, perhaps so; sometimes one is apt to get bitter or at the least uncharitable. But my heart has ached more than once by seeing a man's life and influence ruined by the wife he has chosen. Many a good man has lost a good living because the nominators were afraid to give it on account of his wife's influence. A clergyman's wife stands in one of the most difficult positions a woman can occupy. She is expected to do things no other man's wife is expected to do, and work harder, to be at the beck and call of the parish, to take meetings, organize working parties, and visit unceasingly, and all this in addition to the home claims."

"But, Aunt, I thought it a beautiful thing to marry a clergyman."

"So it is, child, if he be a good man, and God brings you together, instead of your own plotting and planning. There is no sweeter or holier calling than to be the true helpmeet of a man of God, be he clergy or layman. If it be of the former, you must make up your mind to face criticism and misunderstandings, but open doors

of service will meet you on every hand. Thank God for the many good women working in our land, both married and single! What a world it would be without them! And thank God, too, for the many clergy and ministers who have God-given wives, who help and support them in every effort they make to spread the kingdom of Christ.

"For myself, I have come to the conclusion why worldly girls run after clergy is that in the bottom of every human heart there lurks a desire, albeit a feeble one, to be better and to live a holier life, and who more likely to help us to this end than a minister of the Gospel? Therefore in linking her life with one professing to lead men to Christ, she too hopes to be helped heavenward."

"Perhaps so," replied Gwen thoughtfully. "But did Gem hate any one?"

"Yes, but that comes later. Her life was a happy one, although her mother's loss made a sad blank. Still, she had plenty to do, for they were poor, and baby and housework kept her busy, so busy that gradually the longed-for ambition of being a teacher faded away as she realized how impossible it would be to leave her old father and little sister.

"It fell to her lot to be Gwynneth's teacher, however, and all the child ever learned she

learned at home. She was intensely musical, and I can hear her voice now as she sang to her old father and sister in the long evenings, he sitting listening with closed eyes, with all a true Welshman's love for music, and Gem busy with her needle, but never losing a note of the melody.

"And so seventeen years sped away."

"Oh," gasped Gwen. "What a jump, Auntie! Didn't anything happen in between?"

"Nothing particular. Nothing ever did happen in that retired spot. Births, marriages, and deaths followed each other, but at the tiny parsonage the three 'pursued the even tenor of their way,' hearing little and seeing less of the great big world outside.

"And then the break came."

The speaker paused, and again the wistful look came into her eyes as she sought the rosy clouds, fast losing their sunset tints in the darkening shadows.

Almost unconsciously Gwynneth had edged her chair nearer to the invalid's couch; she was deeply interested.

"How did it come, Auntie?"

Miss Owen started.

"Ah! I had forgotten. Yes, child, the break came, although we did not recognize it as such at the time. We are so slow, so terribly slow sometimes to own to the

‘Little rift between the lute  
Which by and by will make the music mute  
And ever widening, slowly silence all.’

“It began with Gwynneth. She was seventeen now, and oh, so pretty and bonny. Her eyes and hair were just like yours, Gwen—hair all curls and waves, and tints of brown and gold, like a setting of glory to the sweet face. She always had a lovely colour too, and if folk did say her mouth had too determined a setting, and she had a will and temper of her own, her father and sister did not mind; she was their darling, the idol of their home, and I fear they both spoiled her sadly.

“One day she went on a message for her father to a neighbouring village some two miles off, and coming home she encountered a strange gentleman who had been fishing, but had an accident, having fallen into the river and got soaked to the skin. He enquired the way to Rhuthyn, and finding Gwynneth was bound thither asked leave to accompany her. So they walked together, and Gwynneth, in her innocent way, told him all the village gossip and family histories, so that when her companion reached the village inn, and on parting asked if he might call upon her father, she at once acquiesced, feeling sure any news from the outside world

would be welcome. That was how they first got to know George Davenant.

"He was a big, tall fellow, and could not have been far off thirty. He said his father owned an estate in Yorkshire, and that he was his only son. He had plenty to say for himself and made himself so agreeable that the old man quite took to him, and Gwynneth was always boasting laughingly how she had brought a prince in disguise to the quiet parsonage. But there was one who never liked him, and that was Gem. From the first she distrusted the man, and her eyes, keen to see where danger threatened her darling, were quick to notice how much the stranger sought the company of her young sister, and how his attentions to her grew day by day.

"At first he was nothing to Gwynneth but a kindly stranger who, for the sake of sport, was staying in Rhuthyn, and she delighted to go with her father as he walked with George Davenant, taking him to the various places of local interest, and pointing out to him the best places by the river banks for fishing.

"The old man was glad of a congenial companion, and as the stranger prolonged his stay and the days passed into weeks, bringing daily visits from this new acquaintance, he forgot how little they knew about him, and ever gave him a kindly welcome. But the awakening

came when one fine morning George Davenant paid a visit to the parsonage and boldly demanded Gwynneth for his wife. The old father was stunned. He had forgotten how the years had flown, and that his baby was no longer a child, but a woman, standing on the borderland of her eighteenth year, but as her lover went on to say how much he loved and admired her, and that the ten years' difference in their ages would make no difference in their love and so on, her father began to give way, specially as Gwynneth herself seemed so madly in love with the man.

"So they were engaged, and George went away, promising to return before long; but the summer faded and autumn and winter later ere they saw his face again. True, he wrote constantly, and Gem tried hard to conquer her dislike to this brother-in-law in prospect, but try as she would she felt somehow she could not trust him, and at length held her peace when her father rebuked her for her lack of charity.

"The summer had come again before George found his way to Rhuthyn, but a month later he made Gwynneth his wife, and took her away to her new home. He said he had been busy preparing it for her, and when the child asked if it was near his father's, he had laughed and replied they would be happier away from his family.

"I often think now how blindly Gwynneth's old father and sister acted, and how implicitly they believed George's plausible story that his mother was dead and his father too old to travel so far for the wedding. They let the child marry this man, of whom they knew next to nothing, except from his own statements, and go away with him to the Isle of Wight, where he said he had prepared a cosy little nest for her. So far this was true, as Gwen wrote home glowing accounts of her pretty little house, and always spoke warmly of her husband's care for her. Still, there always seemed a lack; she never mentioned her husband's people, though now and then she dropped a word in her letters, showing she felt their silence in never taking any notice of her marriage.

"The child never seemed to trouble herself as to George's profession. That he made frequent trips to London, sometimes being away for a night or two, satisfied her that he was 'a business man.' I know now he was on the Stock Exchange."

Gwynneth had sat motionless, listening to her aunt's recital with bright eyes that never wandered from the speaker's face. Now she rose from her chair and came and knelt by the invalid's couch.

"Go on, Aunt," she whispered. "I do want to know what happened."

"Well, dear, life was very quiet for the two left in Rhuthyn after Gwynneth's departure. She had been so bright and cheerful, the sun-beam of the home, that the house grew unusually silent, the old pastor taking more and more to his books, and Gem to her reading and sewing."

"Did she get to like George?" asked Gwynneth.

"No, she always distrusted him and he knew it, and consequently never seemed to care for her to visit them, and as it was a long journey and money was not very plentiful in the little Welsh parsonage, she had to be content with her sister's letters. It was not until afterwards she knew how often Gwynneth longed for her, and how earnestly she pleaded with her husband to invite her to visit them.

"At length, she got her way, Gem was asked, but there was a reason for it. Gwynneth was far from strong, and her constant cry was for her sister. So one bright autumn day Gem found herself being carried by steam to her sister's abode, and was glad indeed once more to hold her in her arms. George, too, was kind in his welcome, but he took the opportunity of Gem's advent to run up to town, and stayed away for ten days. Before his return Gwynneth had become a mother."



A long gasp and prolonged "Oh!" fell from the listener's lips. Her hands were tightly clasped, and drawing still closer to her aunt she whispered: "Aunty, was *I* that baby?"

Miss Owen's lips trembled, and she grew a shade paler. Then her hands sought the girl's soft hair and she stroked it lovingly.

"My darling, how did you guess it?"

"I—I—sort of felt it all along, and that you were telling me the story of my own father and mother, and—and—yourself, too. You were Gem, were you not, Aunty?"

"Yes, I was Gem. It was my father's pet name for me. I have not heard it for years."

"And so I was born in the Isle of Wight? Well, please go on, Aunty."

"Before your birth, your mother and I had many talks. She opened her heart to me as she had never done in the past. Oh, yes, your father loved her, but she was always puzzled why he never took her to see his own people. She never knew why, but alas! I found it out only too soon. Your father had told the truth in saying he was an only son, but he hid the fact that his father knew nothing of his marriage. The old man had made up his mind his son should marry the child of his next neighbour and thus unite their properties together, but George really loved your mother and made up his mind to marry

her quietly, trusting to his father's forgiveness, and feeling sure of it if only he could present him with a grandson, as he was most anxious for an heir. You can therefore understand the disappointment it was to him when he found out your sex. Your dear mother only lived to fold you in her arms and then place you in mine, asking me to mother you as I had her."

"And you have, Aunt, oh, indeed, you have!" cried Gwynneth, bursting into tears and flinging herself into her aunt's arms. "You have been the dearest, kindest and best Aunt any one ever had. You have been like a mother to me, and, oh, I do wish I had been better to you."

"Hush, hush, my darling! You have been everything to me. There, now, dry your eyes. I am getting weary and want to finish my story before we go to rest."

With an effort Gwynneth composed herself. She, too, wanted to hear more.

"As soon as your dear mother was laid to rest, your father seemed to lose his head. He raved about his dead wife, declaring he had never been good enough for her, and almost cursed the day which brought him first to Rhuthyn. He declared that her death was a judgment upon him for having made a secret marriage, and that as you were only a girl, he would never be able to acknowledge you to his

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father. He begged me to take you for good and all, declaring he never wished to see you again, and promising me a yearly sum for your maintenance. I was deeply grieved and hurt, but I accepted the charge, and as soon as possible left the island and brought you to your grandfather's house. But the death of his favourite daughter had been too much for him; he lived for only six months after her, and then he too followed her Home.

"I think you know the rest. I felt I could not stay alone in that spot where everything reminded me of my lost parents and sister, and so before long I came here, and here we have remained."

"And my father? Did you never see him again?"

"Never; neither have I heard from him. As far as the money was concerned, that was and is paid regularly through his solicitors. But I have never touched a penny of it. I felt it would burn me. Until you were twelve, I received a hundred pounds a year. Since then, I have received two hundred. Your father must be a wealthy man, but I know nothing about him. He gave you up, desiring never to see you again, and he never has. He may be dead or alive, married or still a widower. I know nothing. Ah, child, it has been a hard struggle to forgive

him." The speaker's voice trembled, and Gwynneth only clung to her the closer.

"But have you, Auntie?" she asked.

"Yes, dear, fully and freely. For years I nursed my wrong and bitter feelings, and like all wrongs brooded over, magnified his sins. Then God met me, and showed me how much need *I* had of forgiveness. He took me to Calvary, and there I learned the sweetness and peace that comes from forgiven sin. Since then I have not found it hard to forgive, for my hate turned to pity, and for years I have prayed daily for the one who brought so much trouble upon us. And, my darling, when I am gone—nay, don't shrink and cry, I know I cannot remain very long with you—remember, if your father should be alive and need you, your place is to go to him."

"To him!" exclaimed Gwynneth, her eyes flashing, as she drew herself away from her aunt's embrace. "Oh, no, Auntie, I could not, indeed I could not. You don't know what you are asking. Go to the man who secretly married my mother and threw me aside, never once asking for me all these years! Oh, no! no! a thousand times no!"

She was very excited, but her aunt took her hand and stroked it gently.

"Still, he is your father, Gwynneth, and God

can make you love him. I know I can trust my child to do her duty."

Gwynneth buried her face in Miss Owen's bosom, as she murmured: "I only hope he is dead."

"Perhaps he is," observed her aunt gently. "Anyhow, God will take care of you. I have left you under Evan's guardianship, and your father's money is safely invested for you. The cottage and land is yours. I bought it with the money which came from the insurance of your grandfather's life. We have lived on my annuity; it dies with me." She ceased speaking, and lay back with closed eyes, and Gwynneth little guessed what the recital of her history had cost her.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WISHING WELL

"There is no action of man in this life which is not the beginning of so long a chain of consequences, as that no human providence is high enough to give us a prospect to the end."—THOMAS OF MALMESBURY.

FOR hours after Gwynneth retired to rest she lay tossing feverishly from side to side. She was very excited, for the recital of her family history had stirred her soul to its depths, while anger, sorrow, and anxiety each strove for the mastery. Not so with the quiet sufferer in the adjoining room, who, having at last told the secret she had hidden for years in her own bosom, felt that her child was now no longer in ignorance of what no one else could have told her, and that her last piece of work was done. So she slept the quiet sleep of a tired and trustful child, while the tossing form next door kept its weary vigil and longed for the next day.

It was early morning when at length the brown eyes closed and Gwynneth fell into a troubled sleep, only to dream of all sorts of

miseries, and so was glad when at six o'clock she awoke and found it broad daylight.

She rose wearily and went to the open window, drinking in the sweet fresh air as it came wafted over the shimmering sea. Her window faced the west and the sea, but she could see the reflection of the rising sun in the waves, and a great longing seized her to be up and away from all the scenes of the past night.

Hastily putting on her clothes, she opened her door softly and crept downstairs. Not a sound broke the stillness, and she knew from certain sounds proceeding from Matti's bedroom that she still slept the sleep of the just. Her little dog Taffy, a Welsh terrier, a gift from Evan, raised his head and wagged his tail as she entered the kitchen, and then rose lazily and followed her, as she opened the back door and stepped into the garden.

How fresh and sweet everything seemed! Late roses still hung from the walls of the little cottage, while carnations, stocks, and southernwood scented the air with their fragrance. Gwynneth passed down the narrow pathway and let herself out through the rustic gateway, into the meadow beyond; then she sped along, accompanied by Taffy, in the direction of the limekiln. Up the cliff she climbed, keeping close to the edge all the time and looking down

on the sanded beach below, as she rose higher and higher.

The dark seaweed-covered rocks rose in solitary grandeur below, beaten by the waves of the incoming tide. Once on the summit of the cliff, Gwynneth walked less quickly and feasted her eyes on the wide range of scenery around. There to the left lay the Skerries, while on the right she could discern Middle Mouse Island, and get a peep at St. Patrick's Church. Such a tiny church, not seating a hundred people, and dating back to the fifth century. Tradition gave out that the saint had been wrecked on Mouse Island and had swum to shore, alighting on the rocks close to where St. Patrick's well, the wishing well, still lay concealed. He had climbed the cliffs and preached to the people on the site of where the tiny church, which bears his name, now stands. Leaving the lime-kiln on her left Gwen suddenly made up her mind to visit the saint's well, and in a short time found herself scrambling down the rocks to get to it.

Yes, there it lay, fresh and sparkling, and with a sigh of content she seated herself by its side and gazed around. Suddenly she started. A sudden remembrance had come to her. The well was a wishing well, and had always exercised a certain amount of superstition over her. And



why should she not wish? She never had greater need, so kneeling by the flowing water she said aloud slowly:

"I wish with all my heart that the day may come when I shall be avenged for the wrong done me by my father."

She closed her eyes as she uttered the words. Was it a prayer, an imprecation, a prophecy, or only an idle wish? She could not say; but after giving a little shudder she stooped and drank of the clear cool water as if to seal her words. How fresh it tasted, and how beautiful everything looked that autumn morning! Soft white clouds floated over the azure sky, skylarks were singing as they soared into the blue heavens, while the cry of a seagull, as it hovered over the deep in search of some unwary fish, fell on her ear.

With a sigh she rose, and once more climbing the rocks began slowly to retrace her steps homeward. She walked slowly, now and then plucking a wild flower as she went, in her heart a wild unrest and a great bitterness.

She was not sorry she had heard at length her past history. She had always felt there was something kept from her, and now she suddenly recollected with a start that the name of Owen, by which she had always been known, did not belong to her. But what was her name? She



Gwynneth started violently when a hand touched her shoulder (page 57)



had forgotten to ask. Never mind, she would enquire of her aunt later on.

Why was the world so beautiful when she was so unrestful and sore within? She almost stamped her feet as she stood on the lush dewy grass listening to the happy songs of the birds around her. Not a soul was to be seen, and a sense of intense loneliness suddenly swept over her. Burying her face in her hands she burst into a passion of tears, and threw herself against the low moss-grown wall which ran by the side of the meadow. It was not often she gave way, but the child-girl was thoroughly unnerved, the long restless hours of sleeplessness, as well as her heavy burden, were telling on her, and ever since uttering those words at the wishing well a superstitious awe seemed to overshadow her.

So absorbed was she in her grief that she never heard a footstep coming over the grassy pathway, and started violently when a hand touched her shoulder and a well-known voice exclaimed:

"Why, Gwynneth, little Gwen, what's the matter?"

She turned, and found herself face to face with the kindly, but anxious, face of Evan Hughes.

"Oh, Evan, how you startled me!" she cried

half crossly. Then, "Nothing's the matter, only I'm tired, and—and——"

"I was afraid Aunt Mary was worse," he said quietly. "But you have no business to be tired at half-past seven in the morning. Why, you should be as fresh as a lark, *merch i*; what brings you out so early?"

"What brings *you* out?" she retorted saucily. "You are not given to such early strolls usually."

"No; but I was called up at four o'clock to Farmer Smith's, and have left him the proud father of twin sons. Come, it's time you went home to breakfast, for I'm pretty sure you left the house without eating a morsel, eh?"

He looked questioningly into her tear-stained face; the dark rings round her eyes and the droop of her weary eyelids did not escape his keen glance, and slipping her hand into his arm he began the homeward march.

She let him lead her; the very touch of his strong fingers seemed to rest and bring her comfort, and gradually a sense of having some one who loved and protected her brought comfort to her weary heart. And she never knew how underneath his rough pilot cloth jacket his heart was beating quicker than usual, and how it required all his strength of purpose to keep from saying the words that would rise to his lips

But Evan Hughes was a man of honour. Had he not promised her aunt that until Gwynneth was twenty-one he would not declare his love?

"She is but a child, Evan," Miss Owen had pleaded, when he had, knowing the precarious condition of the latter, opened his heart to her, and begged to be allowed to seek to win the girl's heart. "She is but a child, and at her age does not know her own mind. She loves you, I know, and looks upon you as a brother. Let it be, dear boy, for I leave her in your charge, only if her father be alive and claims her until she come of age, she is bound to him. It is hardly fair to tie her until she is older and has seen more of life, but you know it is the dearest wish of my heart to see the two I love best united as man and wife. I have a strong feeling it will be some day—when, I cannot say—but until she has attained her twenty-first birthday, promise me you will keep silent."

So Evan had promised, but how hard it was to keep his word he never realized till that autumn morning as they walked homeward together.

His genial manner and bright talk soon cheered his companion, so when he parted from her at the little gate, it was a smiling face that bid him farewell.

"You won't come in to breakfast, Evan?" she asked.

"No; I have another case to be visited at the end of the village," and lifting his cap he trudged off, while Gwen turned and entered the house. But how still it seemed; could Matti have overslept herself? No, she was up, for passing through the kitchen she saw the fire was alight and the kettle boiling briskly. Besides, there in the toast rack stood the toast ready for her aunt's tray, which stood close at hand. But where was Matti? Passing through the kitchen she made her way across the tiny hall and was half-way upstairs when the sound of violent weeping fell on her ear and made her quicken her steps. Bounding up the stairs she pushed open the door of her aunt's room, which stood ajar, and then felt as if turned to stone.

Matti was there, poor Matti, her apron thrown over her head, and her whole body shaking with the violence of her grief as she rocked herself backward and forward, repeating over and over the refrain: "*Gwae fi! gwae fi!*" \*

Too absorbed was she in her own grief to notice the entrance of Gwen, who, after one glance at the distracted Matti, turned instinctively towards the bed where her aunt slept.

And truly she did sleep. There lay the quiet form, white and still, the eyes closed as if in sleep, but the lips parted in a happy smile. Her

\* "*Woe is me!*"

hands lay outside the coverlid, and in one of them lay a small open book, which Gwen at once recognized as her much-loved "Daily Light." She had evidently been reading it when her call came. The candle, on the small table by the bedside, had burned down to its socket.

Noiselessly and half tremblingly, Gwynneth stole over to the bed and gently touched one of the white hands. She drew back with a low cry. It was cold as stone. The next minute she had fled from the apartment, and with flying steps was down the stairs, through the open doorway, and with lightning speed pursuing the departed Evan Hughes.

The young doctor meanwhile was marching along the high road, whistling as he went, and busy with his own thoughts, when the sound of flying footsteps arrested him. He stopped, and turned just in time to meet Gwynneth as she came round the corner. One look told him all, and it needed not her panting: "Evan—Aunty!" to make him set off at full speed in the direction of the cottage. With three leaps he was up the staircase, and the next moment was bending over the bed. One glance was enough, and then he turned to the still sobbing Matti, who at the sound of his voice started and pulled the apron down from her face.

"When did you find her?" he asked abruptly.



"But now, Master Evan, but now. Not ten minutes ago did I come up to pull up the blind and see if she was ready for breakfast, same as I've done all these years. But when I had let in the sunshine and turned, expecting her usual '*Borru da,*' it never came, and when I looked—why, there she lay, and I knew the angels had been before me. Oh! *gwae fi*, but it's a weary day for Matti and the poor child as have lost her. Oh, *anwol! beth na i?*" \*

Once more she buried her face in her apron, and her sobs filled the room.

Evan turned again towards the bed, and touched the cold hand.

"She has been dead several hours," he murmured; "died in her sleep. And it is best," he added gently, as if to himself.

"Why?" came in a hoarse whisper close beside him. "Why is it best? Oh, Evan, cannot you do something? Is it indeed too late?"

Gwynneth clasped her hands in an agony of grief. She was still panting from her rapid run, and he saw that a little more would make her faint. Matti had stolen downstairs, so he gently took her hand and placed her in an easy chair.

"No, dear, I can do nothing," he answered.

\* "Oh, dear! what shall I do?"

"She has been gone several hours. Indeed, I should say she must have died soon after getting into bed, and very gently and peacefully. See how happy she looks. Truly 'He giveth His beloved sleep.'"

He was deeply moved. Gwynneth could see that, and he began slowly pacing up and down the room, a habit he had when unduly excited. She sat looking at him silently. Everything seemed like a hideous dream, and she had a curious feeling that presently she would wake up and find everything as she had left it.

"Yes, it is best," Evan was saying; "it has been an easy passage for her, far easier than I imagined it would be. God only knows the extra suffering she has been spared. It is truly merciful and I am glad, but, oh, how we shall miss her!"

Something like a groan burst from his lips, and he went over and leaned against the window frame, gazing out with large wistful eyes over the sunlit sea.

But his grief had unsealed the fount of Gwynneth's, for she rose with a cry and flung herself in an agony of grief upon her aunt's bed, and it took all Evan's power of persuasion to let him lead her away and make her lie down on the sofa in the drawing-room.

Having left her there and forbidden her to

rise till he came back, he made his way to the kitchen, where the distracted Matti was sitting, rocking herself to and fro in her grief.

Seeing the teapot on the table, he put in some tea, poured boiling water on it from the hissing kettle, arranged the toast, butter, and sugar on the tray which had been prepared for her who no longer needed earthly food, and then taking it up, once more set out for the drawing-room. Placing the tray on a table, he poured out a cup of tea and came over to Gwynneth's side.

"Gwynneth, you must take this," he said firmly. "See, I have made it for you," and he handed her the cup.

But the girl shook her head. "I can't," she murmured, "indeed, I can't. How could I be so heartless as to eat and drink with *her* lying upstairs like that?" And she burst into a fresh paroxysm of weeping.

Evan took a chair beside her.

"Little woman," he said tenderly, for his own heart felt sore and desolate, "it will do dear Aunt Mary no good your starving yourself and making yourself unfit for work. A great many things will have to be seen to, and I shall need your help. If she were here, I know she would say, 'Be brave, and don't neglect your body.' To please *her*, won't you take it?"

Her large brown eyes met his, and he gave a

faint smile. She put out her hand and took the cup he held out to her, and began to drink.

"That's right. Now you are good and brave. Come, eat this piece of toast while I see if I can induce Matti to have a bite, too."

Taking up the teapot he quitted the room, and Gwynneth could hear him coaxing and comforting the faithful old creature who had been the family friend for so many years.

When he returned the toast had disappeared, and Gwynneth was sitting upright, the empty cup in her hand.

"I have been selfish. Forgive me, Evan," she murmured. "I should have thought of you. Let me pour you out some tea. I feel stronger now."

He let her rise and exert herself, knowing it was best for her, and so took the food and drink she prepared for him. Then he insisted upon her lying down in her own room, while he went to the village to procure help from some of the kindly neighbours who he knew would gladly do the last kind offices for the loved and honoured dead. But before leaving the house, he once more entered the peaceful chamber and looked on the calm form, robed in the stillness of death. Miss Owen had never been particularly good-looking, but death had stamped her features with unearthly beauty. Already the

wrinkles and creases of time were disappearing, and she lay like a white marble figure, the smile on her face seeming to deepen the longer he gazed upon it.

Silently the strong man wept, then reverently knelt and kissed the cold forehead.

"Farewell," he murmured, "mother, aunt, friend, and counsellor, all in one. None will miss you more than the motherless boy who always found a home in your heart, and who, by God's grace, will keep the promises he made you."

He rose, and noticed the little book still lying open in the cold hand. He glanced at its contents. It was a little well-worn "Daily Light," and his eye fell on the evening portion for October 5th; evidently she, too, had been reading it ere the call came:

"Yet a little while (*Gr.* how little, how little), and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

And lower down on the same page:

"For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside Thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him" (Heb. x. 27; Isa. lxiv. 4).

"Amen," he murmured softly. "The dear aunt has seen it now, and for her all pain and

sorrow are at an end. Wonderful mystery, to think that nothing but a breath divides us from that Other Where, and how lightly we think and talk about it! Ah, me, she was ready if any one was. Would to God I was too!"

He heaved a deep sigh, and shutting the door gently, left the house.

## CHAPTER V

### AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

"He who for love has undergone  
The worst that can befall,  
Is happier thousandfold than one  
Who never loved at all.  
A grace within his soul hath reigned  
Which nothing else can bring,  
Thank God for all that I have gained  
By that high suffering."—LORD HOUGHTON.

THE days that followed were busy ones for Evan. He seemed to be needed here, there, and everywhere. His life, specially at that season of the year, was always busy, but now he had the added duties to perform of comforter to the two lonely women at the cottage, as well as superintending and making arrangements for the funeral, and writing to Miss Owen's solicitors.

He at once made them acquainted with the fact of her death, and asked them to convey the intelligence to Gwynneth's father, should he still be alive. Most heartily the young doctor hoped he too might have departed this life, for

the fear of his turning up and taking the girl away hung over him like a dark cloud. To the girl herself those days of sorrow and mourning seemed like a dream. Quiet and subdued she wandered from room to room, gazing at each familiar object, but always, always with the sense of loss closing her in on every side. Now that her aunt was gone she realized how much she had lost, and questions she longed to ask her, or deeds of loving service which she might have performed, kept crowding into her mind, until at times she felt too bewildered for anything, and would dash out of the house and down to the foam-kissed rocks, clambering over them in reckless haste, or taking long lonely rambles over the cliffs and pasture lands.

The funeral was over, and the precious dust laid to rest in the breezy God's acre that surrounded St. Patrick's Church on the edge of the cliff, with the ceaseless roar of the waves breaking over the granite rocks ; there slept the dead until His voice should sound Who would awaken them. A fortnight had slipped away, and Evan Hughes was coming to the conclusion that the man whose advent he feared must be dead, as no word had reached him in answer to his letter.

He found himself continually facing the question : What was to become of Gwynneth ?



She and Matti seemed quite settled in the little cottage, but Evan knew matters could not continue so. The neighbours were all kind, good folk, who sympathized most sincerely with the lonely girl, and more than one would gladly have gone and stayed with her, but she steadily refused all such offers, and besought Evan so earnestly to let her stay as she was, alone with Matti, declaring that she could not stand the presence of an outsider in the house, that he had let her have her way, but kept a watch on her movements. Every day he found some excuse for making his way to the tiny cottage, and indeed there was plenty for him to do, for having been left guardian to Gwen until she came of age, he had papers to go over, and various forms of business to transact on her behalf. October was drawing to a close, and more than one severe storm bade them remember that winter was nigh at hand.

One afternoon, after a stormy night, Gwyneth was returning from a solitary stroll, and standing in the garden was taking a last look at the sinking sun ere she re-entered the house.

Suddenly the sound of wheels caught her ear, not the slow rumble of cart wheels so familiar to her, but a quick rushing sound, and turning she saw a handsome motor fly past the gate and down the road to the village.

Motor-cars were not common in this part of the world, the roads were not good for travelling, and Anglesey was out of the beaten track, so with a passing wonder as to who it could be, she entered the house.

A bright fire burned in the grate as she opened the drawing-room door and stepped inside, and Matti's kindly hands had spread the little table with a dainty tea. Now that her beloved mistress had gone, she seemed never able to do enough for the one left of the family whom she had so faithfully served for the best years of her life, and it was to her Gwynneth mostly turned for comfort, and loved to sit close to the old woman, holding her hand and listening to her as she poured out her soul in praise of her lost mistress.

"And Miss Gwen, *merch i*, you'll follow in her steps, won't you? Never turn into one of them grand young ladies that does no good in the world, and forgets all about them as loved and taught them. Tut, tut! but life is strange for surely; the one that seems needed most goes off, and here's a useless old woman like me left behind."

But here Gwynneth's arms were thrown round the speaker, and her words stopped by a hug.

"You're not useless, Matti; think, what

should I ever do without you ? You are the only one I have to take care of me, and you mustn't speak like that."

"Well, then, and what about Master Evan ? Is he not caring for you, *merch i* ? How would he like to hear you speak in this way, eh ? "

"Evan ? Oh, he's different. Yes, of course, he always looks after us, and has always been a dear good boy, and with him and you I ought to be content."

"Yes, yes, *b't shwr*. And the Lord cares for us all, yes, *all*," and with cracked voice, trembling with emotion, Matti broke into the familiar and much-loved hymn, "*Yn y dyfroedd mawr a'r tonau*." \*

On the evening in question, Gwynneth threw herself into a low chair and began pouring out the tea at her hand. Sometimes Evan dropped in if he was passing, and, as he had not appeared before that day, she half expected him.

Presently his well-known step sounded on the gravel, and the next minute he had entered. In an instant Gwynneth was on her feet.

"Oh, Evan, how glad I am you have come ! The wind is rising. Do you think there will be another storm ? The wind sounds so dismal with that wail in it, and always makes me fear something dreadful is going to happen."

\* "In the deep waters and the waves."

"Nonsense, little woman!" answered Evan, as he gently replaced her in her chair, and took the cup of tea she offered him. But he gave a little shudder, nevertheless. It was not like Gwynneth to talk like this. Was trouble near at hand?

"You have taken too long a walk and are tired. I wish you'd let Winifred Thomas come and stay with you. She would cheer you up, and, I know, would come gladly."

"But I don't want her. I don't want cheering up, I want things to go on just as they are. Matti and I are very happy together, and with you dropping in, why can't we just go on?"

"But, Gwynneth," continued the young doctor, who knew how tongues had been wagging at his constant visits, and who had made up his mind, if possible, to persuade his charge to have a suitable companion, "things can't go on quite as they were. You are too young to live alone, with only Matti for company."

"I'm nineteen," broke in Gwynneth hotly. "I'm not a baby; I can take care of myself."

"I'm sure you can; but still it is not right your not having a third person in the house. Just think if Matti got ill, what would you do——"

"Nurse her," broke in Gwynneth again.

"Yes, I'm sure you would; but suppose she got ill in the night, or you got ill and could not

be left, or an accident happened, how would it be then ? ”

Gwynneth was silent.

“ So you see,” continued Evan, following up his subject, “ it’s really wrong for you to insist on remaining alone. And besides, I’m sure *she* would not have liked it.”

The girl’s eyes filled with tears.

“ Well, I’ll think about it and who I’d like, and tell you to-morrow. Will that do ? ”

“ Yes, that will do,” answered Evan, considerably relieved, and then they began to talk on other subjects, till Evan rose to go.

“ I must be off,” he said, as he began buttoning up his coat. “ John-of-the-Mill has given his knee a nasty twist, and I fear Hetty Williams’ little one won’t pull through the night. Farewell, take care of yourself.”

And with a handshake and cheery smile he was gone, and Gwynneth turned once more to the fire and stood thoughtfully gazing into its glowing caverns. She hated the thought of having a companion. To have another, and that one perhaps almost a stranger, occupying her aunt’s room and chairs, lying on the sofa she occupied, and continually coming in and out—she shrank from it more and more, and gave her foot an impatient stamp as she murmured :

“ It’s too bad of Evan to make me promise !

Why shouldn't Matti and I live on as we are doing? He lives alone, and why shouldn't I? I hate it, I hate it, and wish——"

She stopped suddenly, for just then she heard a sharp ring at the bell, and listened as Matti's heavy footsteps sounded in the hall. Who could it be? She had few visitors, and she could distinctly hear a man's voice, but she was not left long in doubt, for the door opened and Matti, her face white and drawn, appeared, and with trembling voice announced:

"A gentleman to see you, Miss Gwen."

A tall dark figure came forward, and Gwynneth found herself in the presence of a man about fifty years of age, whose steel-grey eyes, overshadowed by heavy eyebrows, were gazing at her critically.

She met his gaze with a slight bow, which he returned, and then remarked:

"I believe I am speaking to the niece of the late Miss Owen?"

Gwynneth winced involuntarily. The words grated on her ear, but she simply replied in the affirmative.

"Then you are Gwynneth? Do you know who I am?"

The girl flushed, and then with a flash the truth forced itself upon her and she clutched the back of a chair to steady herself.

"Not—not my——"

The words died on her lips, but her visitor finished the sentence by remarking with a short laugh :

"Your father, my dear ; your father, George Davenant. Have you never heard of me before ?"

The words stung her, and she drew herself up proudly.

"Heard of you !" she exclaimed ; "yes, to my sorrow I have ! Heard how you married my young mother and kept it secret from your family—ashamed to acknowledge your wife and child, and for nineteen years leaving her to the care of others, unaware that she possessed a father until three weeks ago. What has brought you here now, Mr. Davenant ?"

He gave another laugh.

"I can't say you are giving me a very cordial welcome, my daughter. Why am I here ? Why, to see you, of course. What else would have brought me to such an out-of-the-way hole as this ? Such roads ! enough to ruin any motor, and look at the weather !" He turned towards the window, against which the raindrops were heavily beating in unison with the howling wind and the dull thud, thud of the waves against the rocks. "How you have existed so long in such a place passes my comprehension. But ignorance is bliss, I suppose, and you have

seen nothing of the wider world beyond. Well, that can soon be remedied."

He seated himself as he spoke, but never took his eyes off the trembling girl, who still stood holding the back of the chair.

"Come, now, let us be friends, Gwynneth. It's hard for a man to get such a reception from his only daughter, after nineteen years. Come, won't you give me a kiss, child? Oh, very well" (as she shrank away from him), "all in good time. I suppose I can't expect you to make friends so quickly. You are like your mother," he continued; "got the same slight upright figure and way of holding the head, also her hair and eyes. I am glad. Little one, I loved your mother. No, you need not look so dubious. It's the truth, I did love her, and always will do so——"

"Then why did you never acknowledge her to your family?" broke in Gwynneth, with flashing eyes.

"For family reasons. My father had other plans for me, and had it leaked out I was married, it would have ruined my prospects. But I meant to have acknowledged her some day, and would have done so if——"

"If what?"

"If you had been a boy."

"But *I* couldn't help it!" exclaimed the girl. "Boys are not everything."



"True, but my father was particularly anxious for a grandson. Not that it would have mattered much, considering there are two now."

Gwynneth started.

"Then you have married again, and I have brothers?"

"Yes, two; Walter is seventeen, Hugh is twelve. Their mother died a year ago."

His voice softened and a shadow fell across his face. So this tall hard man had had more than one sorrow, and Gwynneth felt less antagonistic than before. Besides, she was interested in her family history. Her father's keen eye noticed the change in her face, and he followed up his opportunity.

"So you see, Gwynneth, I am a lonely man. My sons are away at school, and I have only a housekeeper to look after my big house. Is it not natural I should seek out my daughter and bring her to my home? Come, is this not reasonable?"

"Yes, I suppose so," answered the girl slowly. "But why did you not come before? Auntie was buried quite a fortnight ago."

"I was abroad, and only received the news on Saturday evening on my return home. My solicitors did not know my address, otherwise I should have been here sooner. I left home yesterday, so you see I have lost no time in look-

ing up the lost sheep. This is only Tuesday. Now, when will you be ready to return with me ? ”

Return with him ! The words stunned her, and she sank on to the couch.

“ I—I—don’t want to return with you,” she faltered. “ I can’t leave here ; oh, indeed, I can’t ! What should I do without Evan and Matti——”

“ Matti ! Yes, I see you have her still. She recognized me, I know, and——”

“ Did you know Matti ? ” queried Gwen.

“ Know Matti ? Why, of course I did, and she never forgave me for taking your mother away. As to having her, why, that’s all nonsense. You can’t stay here alone, child ; it’s not right, and I couldn’t allow such a thing. But who is this Evan you mentioned just now ? ”

“ Evan Hughes, our doctor. I’ve known him all my life, and Auntie loved him as a son, and left him my guardian.”

“ Oh, indeed ; that must be the man who wrote apprising my solicitors of your aunt’s death. So he is your guardian, is he ? Well, we’ll see about that. Meanwhile, how soon can you be ready to accompany me home ? ”

Gwynneth was silent. Oh, how she longed for Evan ! She felt just like a bird caught in a trap and saw no way of escape.

"Well, my dear, I have brought my motor. It will be far better for you to return with me than take a long railway journey by yourself. My house is at Eddlewood, in Surrey, a very picturesque part of the world, by the way, but a long distance from here. I intend breaking the journey and spending a night in Birmingham, so prepare for that. The remainder of your luggage can be sent after you. Now, can you be ready to-morrow?"

To-morrow! Gwynneth gazed at him in astonishment.

He laughed. "Well, then, the following day, Thursday? Let us say Thursday. Matti can pack up your things and send them along. Bring warm wraps. It's precious cold driving in a motor this weather. I'll get you decent clothes in London."

Gwynneth glanced down at her black cashmere. She had worn it barely a fortnight.

"My dress is quite new," she said.

"True, but the cut and make is atrocious. Countrified in the extreme. My daughter must have everything of the best. You are not going to live any more in a cottage, Gwynneth."

Gwynneth felt as if a hand were laid on her throat and was gradually choking her. She listened, in dumb silence, to her father as he went on :

"I intend you to be happy, little woman. Your life is only just beginning. The world is a far more beautiful place than Cemaes Bay, and you'll soon make friends of your own age and station in life."

"I don't want friends," broke in Gwynneth. "I have plenty here. Why, I know every man, woman, and child for miles round. They are all my friends, and then there is Evan."

"Evan, Evan. I must see this Evan. Where is he to be found? If he's a sensible old man he'll agree with me that this is no place for you to remain in, but the sooner you are out of it the better."

For the first time Gwynneth laughed. The idea of Evan being called an old man was too much for her, and so tickled her that she lost the drift of the remainder of her father's sentence.

Well pleased to see her smile, and not guessing the reason, he rose to go.

"Well, good-bye, my dear, I'll go back to the inn. See you to-morrow, and go more fully into matters. Meanwhile, sleep well, and don't fret about anything. I'll look up this Evan to-morrow."

He held out his hand, but Gwynneth did not take it. A welcome sound had fallen on her ear. How well she knew that decided footstep!

The next instant the door opened, and the young doctor entered.

"Here is Evan," Gwynneth remarked. Then turning towards him she added :

"Evan, this is my father."

## CHAPTER VI

### INTO THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD

"Much must be borne that it is hard to bear, much must be given away that it were sweet to keep."—OWEN MEREDITH.

**E**VAN HUGHES, marching down the village street, after having parted with Gwynneth, was attracted by a small crowd of men and boys who were eagerly examining something which stood opposite the "Golden Harp," the principal inn the village contained. On coming closer he discovered the something to be a handsome motor-car, which, notwithstanding its liberal covering of mud, he yet could see must have cost its owner no light sum.

"Ah, a motor!" he exclaimed; "what a beauty! Who is the owner, Thomas?"

The man addressed touched his cap.

"Dunno, master," he replied; "but us thinks it's some one as has to do with Miss Owen, as has gone. The gent has gone inside; but us heard him axing about her."

Evan's heart sank. For an instant he thought

of entering the inn and perhaps meeting the individual in question, but just then he was recognized by a small boy, who ran up to him, saying :

“ Oh, Mishteer, *mae fy mrawd yn myned yn waeth-waeth.*” \*

In an instant his attention was arrested. The cry of need never appealed to him in vain, and turning towards the child he replied to him in Welsh, and then set off rapidly in the direction of his cottage.

It was the same baby whom he had mentioned to Gwynneth, and it lay breathing heavily in its mother's arms, more like a little waxen image than a thing of flesh and blood.

Surely there is nothing so pitiful to see as the sufferings of a little child or a dumb animal.

“ *A yw ef o hyd yn fyw ?* ” † asked the doctor, as he entered the room.

The woman nodded silently.

Yes, the baby was alive, but that was all, and the practised eye of the physician saw that the end was near. It was only a question of time, and while doing what he could to ease the little sufferer, the breathing ceased, and baby's spirit was carried away, to be for ever with the Friend for little children.

\* “ My brother gets worse and worse.”

† “ Is he still alive ? ”

With a look of mute agony the poor mother gazed into the doctor's face, and then, clasping her darling to her breast, burst into a long, low wail, as she rocked herself to and fro. Gently and tenderly Evan began talking to her in the soft flowing language they both understood so well; but she heeded him not, and with a sigh of relief he saw her mother enter the cottage with a kindly neighbour, and handed her over to their sympathy and care.

Then he strode down the street, and arrived, as we have seen, just in time to be introduced to the owner of the motor-car by Gwynneth.

The two men looked at each other and bowed, while a smile crept over the face of the elder as he studied the build of his companion.

"From what my daughter said, I was under the impression, Dr. Hughes, that I should meet an elderly man. But I find it is just the reverse. So my late sister-in-law has, I understand, left you as trustee of her property?"

Evan bowed again. "Yes, sir, and guardian of her niece's interests until she be of age."

Again the same smile. Evan did not like it, but stood quietly waiting.

"Ah! Well, having only received the news of her death a few days since, being abroad at the time it took place, I could not come sooner. But I have been making arrangements with



Gwynneth about her future movements, and think it best she should return with me on Thursday."

Evan started, and turned towards the girl.

"It does not leave you much time for preparation," he remarked gently, and her white woebegone face went to his heart.

"No; but my father wishes it," she answered. "I think I can manage. My heavy luggage will follow by train."

"Then that is settled," said Mr. Davenant in a relieved tone. He had feared this young guardian might put obstacles in the way of his carrying off his daughter in so summary a fashion; so with a lighter heart he once more prepared to depart.

"You are going back to the village? Allow me to accompany you," said Evan.

"Certainly; I shall be delighted, and hope you will come in and have dinner with me. There are a good many matters to be talked over. Good-bye, my dear."

This to Gwynneth. She held out her hand. No; she could not kiss this man whom she had known for only one brief hour.

She watched them and then fled—fled to the loving arms of Matti, ready she knew to receive her.

But she was hardly prepared for the look of

hopelessness and woe on the old woman's face. She sat before the fire in the kitchen, her hands in her lap, and lifted her head as Gwynneth entered.

"So he's come, my lamb?" was all she said.

"Yes; he's come. Did you know him, Matti?"

"Know him? Aye, too well, *merch i*. He brought trouble enough before; it's always trouble where he comes. Oh, my lamb! my lamb!"

And folding the girl in her arms, she commenced rocking to and fro.

"Oh, Matti, he is my father! Don't say anything more about him. It will only make it harder for—for—— Oh, Matti, he is taking me away on Thursday, and I've got to go!"

There was a wail in Gwynneth's voice as she finished speaking, and then buried her face in the bosom of her faithful nurse. To the latter the blow was heavy indeed; but the girl's grief made her seek to check her own, and she fondly stroked her hair as she said:

"So soon, *merch i*? Well, it's a sad day for Matti and all of us when your sweet face leaves Cemaes. But he's your father, my lamb, as you say, and you must go with him. I've been fearing he'd come every day, and only last night didn't I dream I saw him come up the garden

path, same as he used at Rhuthyn, when he was courting your sweet mother? Yes; I saw it all, and how she went out to meet him and put her hand in his, and then—why, then I looked, and it was you and not her. And then I awoke, but I knew what it meant. Ah, yes; Matti's no fool. I knew he'd be here, and was even then on his way."

Gwynneth did not speak. She let the old woman ramble on; the very touch of her hands, hard and worn with toil though they were, soothed her; she knew some one cared.

After all, it is not so much what we *say* as what we *do* that brings help and comfort to sore hearts. The soul bowed down in grief and anguish does not want a great talker to comfort it. The soothing touch of a kind hand, the look of sympathy, the respectful silence often do far more than any amount of talk and words of well-meant comfort from one who has never passed over the Sea of Sorrow.

Gradually the girl's tired form slipped down to the floor, and her head rested on Matti's knees. She was very tired; excitement and grief had done their work, and with the warm fire-light falling on her face, and Matti's motherly touch and soothing words, the weary eyes drooped, and soon she had fallen into a heavy slumber.

The watchful eye of the old woman noted this with relief, and she sat on, patiently waiting for the child of her love and care to have her sleep out. An hour passed before Gwynneth moved, and then on Matti's urging her to go to bed, she rose and slowly made her way upstairs, only dimly conscious that she was very tired and miserable. In less than half an hour

"Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep,"

had once more folded her in its embrace.

The following day was a busy one, and Gwynneth found it took all her time to arrange what was to be taken and what left. She gave Matti so many directions and then countermanded them, that the poor old creature was fairly dazed, and broke out at length with :

"There, Miss Gwynneth, dear, have done. Doesn't Matti know what you'll want better than you know yourself? Just put on your best dress the morrow, and take what you'll need for a few days, and all the rest will follow."

So the best dress, a simple black cashmere trimmed with *crêpe*, was put carefully aside for the morrow's wear, with the necessary night apparel, and Gwynneth wandered forth into the fields to take a last look at the setting sun.

It was natural she should turn her steps towards St. Patrick's, and pay a farewell visit to

the newly made grave there, and it was here Evan found her, long after the sun had gone down, when the grey twilight was fast closing in on sea and headland.

"Hi, Gwynneth; found at last!" he exclaimed, in as cheery a voice as he could command. "This won't do, child; you'll catch a fine cold sitting out in this cold spot. Come, we want you at home. Your father has come in for a cup of tea, and is asking for you."

He helped her to rise, and began to walk at a brisk trot, for he felt her shivering, and feared a chill.

Presently the colour came back to her cheek, and she panted: "Oh, not so fast, please; no need to hurry."

"Every need to hurry when two impatient men want their tea."

He laughed, but she did not respond.

"Evan, there are hundreds of things I want to say to you, and I can't remember one of them now. But where have you been all day? I expected you quite early; yes, and father, too."

"Fact is we've been out together. He wanted to see the country round, and suggested my accompanying him in his motor. Besides, I thought you'd get on better with us out of the way. Are you ready for your start?"

"I suppose so; but I hate to think of it. I wanted to go and see ever so many of the neighbours, but I have not time. Will you tell them how it was, and that—that——? I won't be away long, I hope; this will always be my home; always, always."

"I hope so, dear," he responded gently, "and I won't forget your message. And, Gwynneth, remember I am your guardian, and if you ever need a friend, I am here. I will take care of everything for you; Matti, and the house, and all. When you are twenty-one, it is yours, remember."

"Oh, but I hope I'll come back before then. Do you think I will? Two years is such a long while to wait, and I'll never love any place like this."

"Two years soon passes, Gwynneth."

"Do you think so? I don't. When shall I see you, Evan? Before then, I hope."

"I fear not," he replied slowly. He could not tell her of her father's decision that until she came of age no communication was to take place between them. From the very first Mr. Davenant had seemed to divine that the friendship between the two was not an ordinary one, and while he could not dispense with the young doctor's services, at least he could hold them in abeyance.

"My dear Hughes," he had remarked, as they

sat over the fire after dinner on the previous evening, and Evan had finished giving a detailed account of Gwynneth's affairs, "I'm sure I feel very much obliged to you for all the trouble you have taken. I understand Miss Owen left Gwynneth her sole heiress. Besides the cottage, which is freehold, and its three acres of land, it seems there is the money I sent her yearly for the girl's maintenance, which she has allowed to accumulate. Also the old lady's life had been insured for £1000."

"That is so," replied Evan.

"Good; then please let everything remain as it was. Put the insurance money out to interest, and let the cottage. You say Miss Owen remembered Matti in her will?"

"Yes, she is provided for; but it would break her heart to leave the cottage."

"My dear fellow, hearts don't break as easily as all that. In a week's time she would settle down anywhere."

Evan thought differently, but held his peace.

"Yes; let the cottage," continued Mr. Davenant. "I only wish we could sell it, but that cannot be until the child comes of age. It's wretchedly small, and it's not likely that, once she has seen the world, she will ever care to visit these parts again. I fear her education has been sadly neglected."

The words stung his listener, but he answered quietly :

"Not so ; Miss Owen was a very well-read woman. You doubtless know that in her early days she wished to be a teacher. She taught Gwynneth herself, with the exception of the violin, and for that she took lessons twice a week at Bangor."

"At Bangor, indeed ! So the child plays the violin. I'm glad of that. Her mother sang beautifully. I must get her lessons."

Their conversation had then drifted into other channels, and it was not until Evan rose to go that his host remarked casually :

"I hope you won't mind, Hughes, but I think it would be wiser if you held no communication with Gwynneth until she comes of age. Constantly hearing from Cemaes will only unsettle her, and I want her to settle down to her new surroundings as soon as possible. No offence to you, my dear fellow, pray don't think it ; but that is my wish, and I am sure I am right."

Evan's face had flushed scarlet, a fact not unnoticed by his companion ; but he tried to steady his voice as he replied :

"Of course, I must fall in with your wishes, sir ; but on the day Gwynneth attains her majority, I shall consider such restrictions at an end. I only hope your decision will not affect



her health. She is very affectionate and warm-hearted, and will feel it keenly if she thinks herself forgotten."

"Oh, she'll get over it. I'm glad you agree to my wishes. Good night."

And so they had parted; but Evan's heart was heavy.

It was of this he was thinking that October evening, as they walked home together. Oh, how he longed to open his heart to her, to tell her of his love, that love which had wound itself round her from her very babyhood, and had never faltered nor lessened, but only grown stronger, deeper, truer, as the years had gone by!

But his promise to her aunt sealed his lips, and he almost groaned as the thought crossed his mind that ere the two years had passed her hand and heart might have been given into the keeping of another, and he would be powerless to prevent it. It is in such moments of agony that the soul instinctively turns to God, and from the bottom of his heart went up the cry: "Oh, God, help me, and keep her for me!"

Looking at the quiet grave face beside her, Gwynneth little dreamt that under that calm exterior a battle was raging, and a victory gained.

We live so close to each other without knowing it, on the verge of great discoveries and yet

passing them by. Perhaps when we reach the Homeland and read the history of our past, illuminated with the light of God, one of the things that will most impress us will be how often we stood on the borderland of great blessings—blessings and opportunities that would have altered the whole course of our lives, but we either held back and so sank into indifference, or our eyes were blinded by the world's glare, and we missed the ineffable glory close at hand. It was not for nothing the message has come down to us: "Anoint thine eyes with eye salve that thou mayest *see*." Such vision is only obtained under the generating influence of the Holy Spirit of God, but "whosoever will, let him take——"

"Why, shan't I see you, Evan; surely I can do what I like? The house is here for me to come to."

"Yes; but Eddlewood is a long way off, in Surrey, the other side of London. Besides, you will have plenty to occupy you, and will make many new friends. But you won't forget us, I know, and—and—I shall see you when you are twenty-one, Gwynneth."

"Very well," she answered lightly. She felt vexed that he should not have promised to look her up earlier. "Perhaps my father will give a party on that occasion, and if so, I won't forget your promise; mind you don't either."

She gave a little forced laugh, but he answered gravely :

“No ; I won’t forget.”

They could see the lamplight now, streaming through the drawing-room window, and hastened their steps. Mr. Davenant was awaiting them, and though he strongly disapproved of Gwynneth arriving home with her guardian, he held his peace.

“That friendship must be broken off,” was the thought that crossed his mind, but it was a smiling face that greeted the pair. They did not stay long after tea, “for I want to start early,” observed Mr. Davenant as he buttoned up his coat preparatory to his departure. “We must leave Cemaes at nine o’clock, for we may have a breakdown, and that means time ; also the days are shortening so much. I want to reach Birmingham before dark.”

“This is not good-bye ; I shall see you again, Evan ?” asked Gwynneth wistfully, as she bade him “good night.”

“Yes, oh yes ; I will be here at nine to see you off. *Nos da.*”

And he was there, quiet, calm, and self-possessed, helping to carry her scanty luggage down to the motor and pack it in ; to see she was comfortably placed, and then hand her her much-loved violin in its case. To speak words

of cheery farewell, and wish her God-speed as the motor slowly moved off, and left him alone, with Matti and Taffy at the little gate. The poor woman was crying bitterly ; so having led her back into the house, his first business was to comfort her, his next to see that she had a hot cup of tea, for neither she nor Gwynneth had had much of a breakfast.

His kind consideration touched her, and as she looked up at his big manly form, she stretched out her old withered hand, and laid it on his arm.

"God bless you, dear lad ! You always were one to do kind things. It's a mercy you have not gone too, Master Evan."

"Oh, I have no intention of running away, Matti," he said laughingly. "I can't leave my patients, you know. But I've a plan in my head, and want to know what you have to say about it. This house has to be kept for Miss Gwynneth, Matti, and I don't like you to be alone here. Shall I come and live here with you, eh ?"

The old creature clasped her hands with delight.

"Come *here* !" she cried. "Why Master Evan, *bâch* ; 'tis a proud day this is for me to hear you say that. Come *here*, *b't shwr*, and who more welcome ! Why, you've put new life into me, that you have. Wasn't Matti fretting and

worrying as to how lonesome she'd be, and here has the Lord been planning a grand surprise for her!" and she broke into a merry laugh.

"I'm glad you're pleased, Matti. You see, Mr. Davenant wanted the house let; but who would take it? And besides, I wouldn't like strangers knocking about the things. But you and I will take care of everything, won't we, Matti? Now tell me, which room shall I occupy?"

"'Tis all one; go and choose for yourself, lad. Whatever you say, Matti will do."

And so Evan made his way upstairs. The place was somewhat in confusion, owing to the preparations for Gwynneth's journey; but almost instinctively he entered her room. What other could he choose?

The sun was streaming into it, and there stood her open trunk, half packed, while innumerable packages and garments of all kinds lay on chairs, table, and bed. He gazed round, and then his eye fell on a little book left open on the chest of drawers. He recognized it instantly; it was Aunt Mary's "Daily Light." Had Gwynneth been reading it ere she went forth that morning into the wide, wide world? Instinctively he took it up and read the portion for Gwynneth's birthday, a fortnight ahead, October 30th:

"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the Salvation of the Lord. . . .

"Thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto Thee. . . . Wait on the Lord, and He shall save thee. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him : fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass."

Slowly and thoughtfully he read the words, then closing the book, he slipped it into his pocket, and went over and stood looking out of the open window.

"As cold water to a thirsty soul," had the message come to his torn and saddened heart, and he kept saying over to himself : "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him."

"Aye ; that's what I'll do, with God's help," he murmured. "Worrying won't mend matters. I'll just leave her in God's hands ; she's safe there. God bless and keep you, Gwynneth, my darling !"

And then he went downstairs and home.

## CHAPTER VII

### "MUSIC HATH CHARMS"

"O for the fruit—immortal fruit  
Soiled by no earthly leav'n,  
Not fame alone, nor vain repute,  
But something caught from heaven.  
Assurance that my strain has cheered  
One soul, if only one,  
And shed on the dark path it feared  
A passing glimpse of sun."—MACKENZIE BELL.

TO Gwynneth that long motor drive was like an enchanting tale.

Once having left Cemaes behind and seen the last of her dear ones, she drew herself back on the luxurious cushions of the car and had a good cry. She was glad her father had chosen to sit in front with the chauffeur, so she had all the rest of the vehicle to herself; and he, guessing pretty much how she was feeling, wisely took no notice of her, but sat silently smoking and thinking.

They only followed the usual route as far as Bangor, and by the time they had crossed the Menai Bridge, Gwynneth felt better, and had begun to take an interest in the various places

they passed. But now, instead of going round by the coast, they branched off in a more southerly direction, and at eleven o'clock drew up at Bettws-y-coed. Gwynneth was enraptured with the beautiful scenery all round her, and her father did his best to answer her questions, and would gladly have tarried longer in the place, but time did not permit, and soon they were again whizzing on, leaving mountain, lake, and river in their rear. By two o'clock they reached Shrewsbury, and after a hasty meal again were off, reaching Birmingham as the dusk was falling. Except Chester, Gwynneth had never been in England before, or seen a large town, and now the city's rush and traffic almost took her breath away. The never-ending trams kept her in terror of a collision with their car, but her father generally drove himself, and was very careful, and without any accident they pulled up before the Grand Hotel, and Gwynneth found herself in the finest building she had ever entered.

"We will dine in half an hour, Gwynneth," remarked her father, as he passed her over to the care of a smart housemaid, and she felt she was in a dream when later on she followed him into the spacious dining-room and sat down to dinner.

He chatted freely during the meal, and was glad to see the tired look gradually leave her face



and the ready interest she took in her surroundings. But the evening was still young; what would he do to pass the time? Calling a waiter he inquired about the various theatres, but none of the plays suited his taste, seeing which the man remarked:

"Maybe, sir, you're fond of music. If so, there's a horatorio going at the Town Hall, and they do say it's fine. The Birmingham people is great on music, sir, and the 'all is worth seeing, too."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Davenant, glancing at his daughter; "and what oratorio is it?"

"The Helijah, sir. I'm told it's worth hearing by those as likes them things."

"Gwynneth, would you like to go to the Town Hall and hear the 'Elijah'?"

The girl's face brightened. "Oh, very much, but——"

She glanced at her black dress.

"Ah; you think it too soon after your aunt's death. Oh, you needn't mind; no one knows you here, and it's a religious affair besides. What time does it commence?"

This to the waiter, who having given the hour as 7.30 p.m., Mr. Davenant looked at his watch, and found they had an hour to spare. He eyed his daughter critically, and then said:

"I'm going out for a short time, my dear,

and will return for you. Will you remain here ? "

"Yes, or in my room. I'll be ready in time."

"Very good ; then I'll be off," and Gwynneth found herself alone.

For a short time she sat still, amusing herself by watching the people at the different tables, then she rose and went to her room. She had not the remotest idea as to what the "Elijah" was like, but began dressing herself in her walking things, well pleased at the prospect of hearing music. A tap at her door roused her, and opening it, there stood her father, a large brown paper parcel in his hand. Gwynneth looked surprised. He entered, and handing it to her said, with a laugh :

"There, child, let me see how you look in that."

She took it wonderingly, and then gave a cry of delight as she drew out of the cardboard box the most beautiful opera cloak she had ever seen. It was of soft white silk, trimmed with swansdown and lined with white quilted silk.

"For me !" she gasped ; "this lovely thing for me !"

"Yes ; for you, of course. Who else ? I'm glad you like it, my dear. Come, put it on, and then we must be off."

Quickly Gwynneth removed her jacket and

threw the dainty wrap over her shoulders, her father standing by, and giving an approving nod at the transformation. Her country-made black dress was almost completely hidden, and the smiling face, flushed with excitement, peeping out above the swansdown, made a pretty picture.

"Gwynneth, you are the image of your mother."

The ready tears sprang to the girl's eyes. "Am I? I'm so glad."

"Then for her sake will you try to love me a little?"

His voice had grown strangely gentle. Gwynneth looked up, and put her arms round his neck. Something in the expression of his face touched her.

"I'll try, father," she said; "and thank you very much for this lovely cloak."

And then she kissed him.

It was her first kiss, and it thrilled him.

"Good child," he murmured, stroking her dark hair. "But now, come, or we shall be late."

And then they were spinning away in a hansom-cab to the Town Hall. Birmingham may justly be proud of her Town Hall, and even Mr. Davenant, who had travelled far and near, was struck with the spacious building, its height and symmetry and well-chosen frescoes on the

walls. Gwynneth could hardly contain herself, and more than one glanced with admiring eyes on the eager girlish face, with its expression of expectation and pleasure. But when the white-robed choir, with their coloured sashes, appeared, Gwynneth held her breath, and watched wonderingly the quiet figure, dressed in black, which stood so motionless in the centre of the platform.

"Who is it?" she whispered, turning towards her father.

"It's a countryman of yours, if I mistake not. He will take the principal part of Elijah."

And then the beautiful clear voice rang out, and every sound was hushed, Gwynneth's eyes only wandering from the singer to the handsomely bound musical copy of the oratorio which her father had slipped into her hand, and from which she followed each performer as they came forward.

No need to either describe or follow the accounts of that evening. Who that has ever heard that magnificent oratorio, Mendelssohn's masterpiece, can ever forget it! But there were two parts which especially struck Gwynneth. "If with all your hearts ye truly seek Me" brought the tears into her eyes, and seemed the language of her own heart; but when the exquisite strains of "O rest in the Lord" fell on her ear, she quietly dropped her face in her

hands, and her father saw the tears trickling through her fingers.

It made him feel uncomfortable ; he did not understand it, and did not like this show of feeling. His cold undemonstrative nature had nothing in common with the quick impulsive temperament of his child, and it was with a sigh of relief he saw her raise her head for the recitative, "Night falleth round me." She was very quiet during the rest of the evening, and never spoke as they drove home. He wondered of what she was thinking.

"Good night, child ; I fear you are very tired, but I hope you enjoyed yourself," he said, as he bade her good night.

Gwynneth raised her eyes to his.

"Enjoyed it, father ? Why, I was never at anything so beautiful in all my life ! Thank you so much for taking me. I shall never forget it."

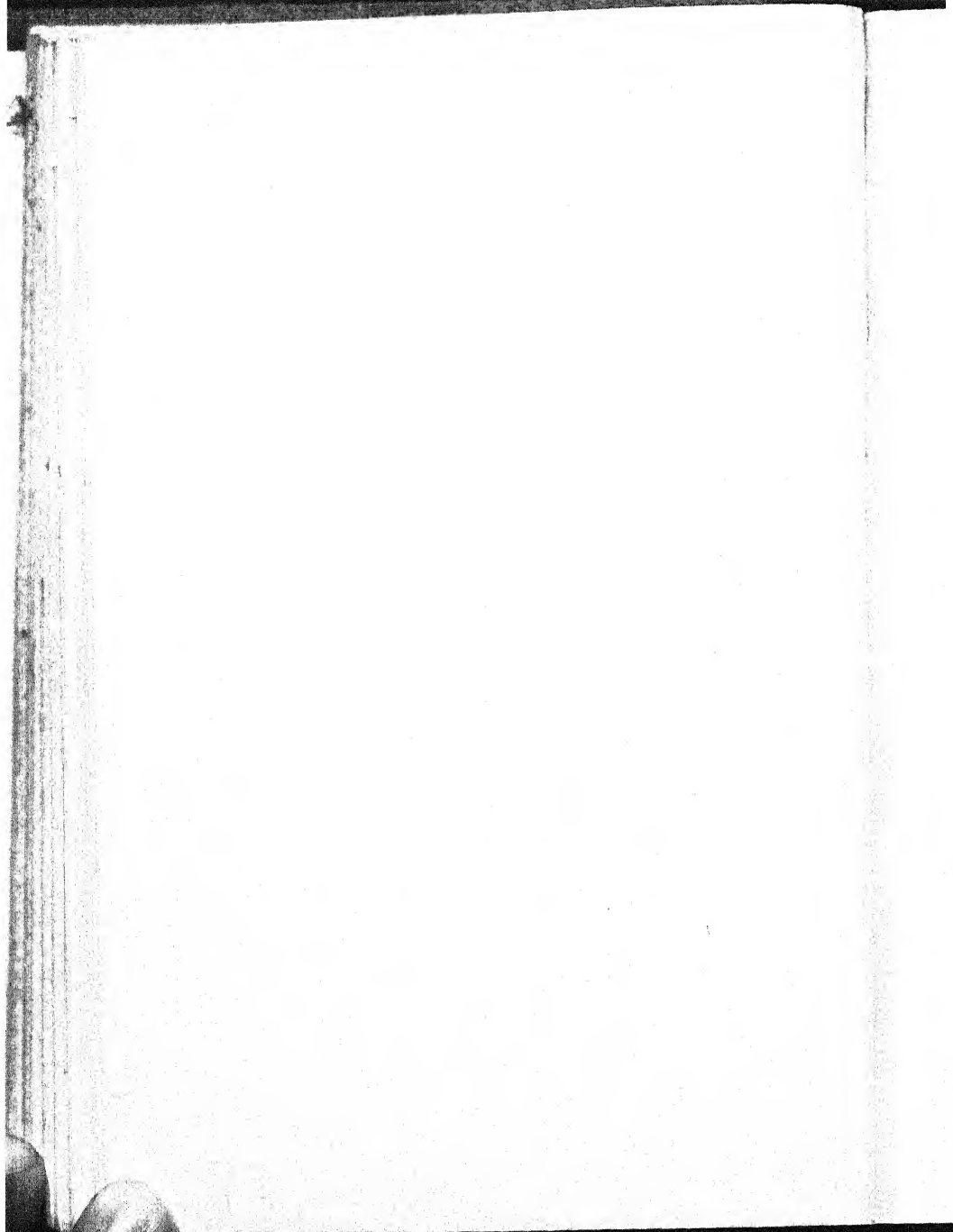
Once more she kissed him, and then went to her room, to dream of Cemaes and old days, through which rang the echoes of the melodies to which she had listened that night.

It was late the following evening when the motor drew up at the door of Oaklands, her father's mansion at Eddlewood.

Gwynneth was dimly conscious of passing through some large iron gates, guarded by a lodge, and then came a short avenue, leading to



"You are welcome, Miss Davenant," she said, in a soft low voice (page 109)



the house. Dark and spacious it loomed out in the twilight, but at once the door was thrown open, and a butler in livery helped her to alight. She stumbled up the steps, for she had been half asleep, and found herself in a large square hall, so large, it was evidently used as a lounge, for two Chesterfield couches and a variety of easy chairs were scattered about, whilst a huge log fire lit up the space around.

As soon as her eyes grew accustomed to the light, Gwynneth became conscious of a kind-faced, elderly woman, dressed in black silk, who came forward to greet her.

"You are welcome, Miss Davenant," she said, in a soft low voice. "Mr. Davenant told us to expect you. I am his housekeeper. I am afraid you are very tired."

Gwynneth held out her hands to the speaker. Something in her voice and manner attracted her.

"Thank you," she said simply. "Yes, I am very tired, but I hope to be all right to-morrow."

"Yes; there's nothing like a night's rest for setting one up. Shall I take you to your room?"

"Thank you," said Gwynneth again; and then she followed her guide up the broad staircase and along the landing, the many doors she passed reminding her of the Grand Hotel. At the end of the passage the housekeeper paused,



throwing open the door of a room, into which she ushered the girl. Gwynneth gazed round her in astonishment. The luxurious brass bedstead, the handsomely finished oak suite of furniture, the heavy curtains and soft mossy carpet, with the firelight playing on the walls and pictures, again made her fancy herself in fairyland. Never, in her wildest dreams, had she imagined herself in such a bedroom as this, and swiftly she began comparing it with her little homely nest in the old home, the plain wooden bedstead and inexpensive furniture seemed so far away.

"I hope you will be comfortable, Miss Davenant."

The housekeeper's voice recalled her to the present, but "Miss Davenant" sounded strange to her ears.

"Oh, it's all lovely!" she replied. "I have never had anything like this in my life, and can hardly believe this is meant for me."

The housekeeper smiled.

"I'm glad you like it. I was really glad when the master's letter came saying he was bringing you home (not but that it was a surprise, seeing as none of us knew he had a daughter), and telling me to prepare the Rose room for you. You see, it was the poor dear mistress's room, and has been shut up since her death. This was her boudoir," and opening a door leading into

another apartment, Gwynneth found herself faced with another surprise. One room led into the other, although both had doors opening on to the landing. This latter apartment was not large, only the same size as the bedroom, but here everything was green. A green carpet, soft as velvet, lay on the floor, green curtains, lined with a lighter shade of the same colour, fell across the windows, a delicately tinted green paper covered the walls, and the chairs and sofa were all covered with material of the same colour. Some exquisite water-colours adorned the walls, and fragrant flowers in pots and glasses filled the room with sweetness.

"Oh!" was all Gwynneth could say.

"The master wrote orders this was to be prepared for you, too. I think you will find it a pleasant room; it overlooks the garden; indeed, both rooms do."

Gwynneth sank into a chair. Was she in a dream?

"Can I unpack for you, Miss Davenant?" queried the kindly housekeeper. "Dinner will be ready shortly. Can I help you?"

"No, thank you," answered Gwynneth. She longed to be alone, and to have time to think. "I have very little luggage; my boxes are coming after us. I will be ready in a few minutes. Thank you."

Kind Mrs. Richardson bowed and withdrew, and Gwynneth began slowly divesting herself of her wraps, and then, after arranging her dark hair and washing her hands, prepared to go downstairs. Just as she was leaving the room an exquisite pale pink rose, half blown and surrounded by maidenhair fern, standing in a little glass on the dressing-table, caught her eye. She took it up carefully, and pinned it in her dress.

Then she went downstairs.

Arrived in the lounge, she looked round doubtfully at the many doors surrounding her, questioning which belonged to the dining-room; but just then the butler appeared on the scene and threw open the door of the apartment she was seeking. Here, within a short time, she was joined by her father, who appeared in evening dress, much to Gwynneth's surprise.

He smiled, and remarked that her choice of a rose showed good taste, as it suited her complexion, thereby making the roses on the girl's cheeks take a deeper hue. She was not used to compliments, and was not sure that she quite liked them.

All through dinner he chatted freely, and if Gwynneth was amazed at the glitter of the plate and cut glass, the luxurious furnishing of the room, and the beauty of the oil paintings

covering the walls, she did not say so, and her father marvelled how she had learned such quiet ladylike manners in her village home.

After dinner they withdrew into the hall, where coffee was served, her father observing it was too late to light up the drawing-room, and he was sure she would like to retire early.

"By the way, I told Mrs. Richardson to place the Green and Rose rooms at your disposal. I hope you will like them. They were my——"

He paused, and Gwynneth exclaimed warmly :  
 "Oh, they are perfectly lovely, father, and I do thank you for putting me there! Mrs. Richardson told me about them. What a nice woman she seems!"

"Yes; I was fortunate to get her. She has been with us three years—came at the commencement of my poor wife's illness, and has proved herself a treasure. She mothers the boys, and is an excellent housekeeper. I am glad to think when I am away you will have her so near you."

"Are you away much?"

"Yes, a good deal; business and other matters take up a goodish bit of my time. Therefore I am all the more anxious you should make some acquaintances. There are plenty of young people, only I don't know them much. But wait till Walter comes; he is the one to liven us up."

"And Hugh?"

"Hugh is only a child; this is his first term at Marlborough. There is a great difference between them."

Short as had been her acquaintance with her father, Gwynneth had made one discovery, that he never seemed so pleased as when talking of his eldest son, and on every possible occasion brought his name into conversation. She felt curious to see her step-brothers, and dimly wondered which she would like best.

Before long she rose to say good night, and it was then her father laid his hands on her shoulders.

"I think we shall be happy together, my dear," he said. "I want you to feel you are, next myself, the head of this house, and hope you will always consider it as your home. Forget the past, child, and though, of course, I hope you will always feel grateful to the friends you have made, believe me, you will soon make others far more delightful and suitable. And, Gwynneth, one thing I particularly desire, that no communication should take place between you and that fellow Hughes. Your poor aunt probably knew no one else to leave responsible for your affairs, and I've no doubt he's a very good fellow, but there—let him go, you'll forget him within six months."

"Never!" exclaimed Gwynneth, her eyes flashing, as she drew herself up and away from her father.

He saw he had made a mistake.

"There, there, child, don't get excited. I meant no harm. Now off with you to bed, but remember, I'll have no letters passing between you and him."

He waved his hand, and without a word Gwynneth turned and left him. She felt boiling, and on reaching her room threw herself on to her bed and burst into an agony of tears.

"How dare he!" she cried, clenching her little hands passionately. "How dare he lay such commands upon me, and say such things of Evan! So that's why he's been so kind, giving me that cloak and putting me into these rooms, all to wean me from my old home and those I love. But he shan't; no, that he shan't. I shall do what I like and write to whom I like. I hate him. I hate him!"

But as her sobs grew less, she became calmer, and other thoughts came to her. She remembered that at present she was legally an infant, and until she was twenty-one bound to obey her father. Indeed, she had a hazy conviction that no matter what her age might be, at no time can God's blessing rest upon those who throw aside parental authority and respect. So after a

time she rose and began slowly undressing herself, and finally lay down, if not happy, at least far quieter than when she came upstairs. Was it "O rest in the Lord" that she heard as she fell asleep?

Downstairs her father sat long, lost in thought. His daughter puzzled and made him uneasy; he saw he must be careful how he managed her, but by ten o'clock he rose, and the look on his face told of a determination arrived at, as he murmured: "Yes, that's what I'll do. She needs a woman's influence, and Lady Alice is just the one. I'll go and see her to-morrow."

## CHAPTER VIII

### "WHERE THE BROOK AND RIVER MEET"

"There is so much bad in the best of us,  
And so much good in the worst of us,  
That it hardly behoves any of us  
To talk about the rest of us."—R. L. STEVENSON.

THE sun was high in the heavens when Gwynneth awoke. Her father had given strict orders she was not to be disturbed, for he estimated truly that the excitement and rush of the previous days would need extra sleep to work them off.

Twice had Nettie, the trim housemaid, peeped into the darkened room, only to find its occupant still asleep. At length, after the clock had struck nine, she made a further venture, and was met by the glance of two bright eyes, while Gwynneth jumped up, exclaiming :

"Where am I ? Oh, I remember. Is it very late ? And who are you ?"

Nettie smiled, and answered the last question first.

"I'm Nettie, one of the housemaids, miss.



Mrs. Richardson sent me to see if you were awake. Shall I draw up the blind, miss ? ”

“ Yes, please, do. Oh, what lovely sunshine ! Isn’t it very late ? ”

“ It’s long past nine, miss, and Mrs. Richardson says wouldn’t you like your breakfast in bed ? ”

“ Oh, no, no. What will my father say to me being late the very first morning ? ”

“ Please, miss, the master gave orders you were not to be awake on any account, and he’s gone off in his motor, and said we were to tell you he had been summoned to London on business, but he’d be home for dinner to-night. And that’s why Mrs. Richardson thought you might as well have your breakfast in bed.”

Gwynneth was on the point of scrambling out of bed, but after this information she hesitated. The luxury of breakfasting in bed was unknown to her, but she made up her mind to try it, and so lay back on her pillow.

“ Please thank Mrs. Richardson, and say, as my father is out, I will stay where I am, as she suggests.”

And then Nettie disappeared, and Gwynneth lay back thinking. How like a dream everything seemed ! The perfectly furnished room with the sunshine streaming in through the window, lighting up the brass fittings of the bedstead, the colours in the carpet, the pictures

on the walls. How exquisitely fine the linen sheets between which she lay, with their broad hem-stitched borders and frills! Surely Matti would think she had been turned into a princess, could she see her now. And yet there was a strange wistfulness in her thoughts of her little bedroom at Cemaes, and her eyes had tears in them as she welcomed Mrs. Richardson with her tray, a fact not unnoticed by the good woman. Her heart had gone out from the first to the lonely girl, so unexpectedly brought into their midst. She was a widow, and the memory of her own bonny lassie who lay sleeping by her father's side was seldom absent from her thoughts, and for her sake, as well as for His Whom she had learned to call Master and Lord, made her tender and loving to every girl she came across. The young maids who came into service at Oaklands were often agreeably surprised at the gentle, thoughtful rule of the housekeeper, more than one of them having come from places where little consideration had been shown to the servants, so the change into a kindlier atmosphere usually ended by the girls seldom wishing for a change, a blessing truly to both mistress and servant.

"My dears," Mrs. Richardson was wont to say to her maids in her motherly way, "if you are comfortable and happy, don't seek a change.

Remember, 'a rolling stone gathers no moss,' and young folk that are always roving seldom get good, but grow into discontented, unsettled women, always wanting a change, and never staying long enough anywhere to gain the love and respect of their employers, so that they can make a friend of them."

Gwynneth greeted her with a smile.

"How kind of you to bring me my breakfast!" she exclaimed. "I'm afraid I'm terribly lazy. Why, I never remember having stayed in bed for breakfast during my life," and she laughed gaily.

"Well, you have had a long journey, Miss Davenant, and getting rested is no laziness. While we have bodies, we must take care of them. There, now, is that comfortable?" as she arranged the pillows at her back, and placed the tray before her.

"Yes, very, thank you," and then Gwynneth began to find out she was hungry, and was already busy with teapot and sugar-basin ere the housekeeper left the room.

She rose soon after she had breakfasted, and when dressed found her way into the sunny garden, where she spent the remainder of the morning, well pleased to wander under the sweet-smelling pines or amongst the still radiant flower-beds.

After lunch, just as she was wondering what she should do with herself, she was told her boxes had come, and so hurried upstairs, and was kept busy arranging her wardrobe and unpacking her various treasures until it was time for tea.

How carefully she drew forth from her trunk a picture, a tiny vase, or some treasured volume, and laid it down while she looked around for a suitable spot in which to place it! It was then she discovered a little bookcase with glass doors in the sitting-room. It had escaped her notice up to this, and what was her delight on opening it to find it filled with books. She took down one and another, and found the same name written in each, "Edith Davenant." "They must have belonged to my step-mother," she murmured, and fell into a reverie, wondering what she had been like, and whether, had she lived, would they have been friends.

She was still standing by the bookcase when Mrs. Richardson again appeared, this time to tell her that tea awaited her in the lounge.

"Oh, Mrs. Richardson," exclaimed the girl, "I suppose these were my step-mother's books? You knew her, didn't you? Do tell me what she was like."

"There's a saying, Miss Davenant, 'Show me your bookcase and I'll tell you what you are,' and I think you'll learn something of what my

dear lady was if you study her bookcase. She kept her special favourites there, and many a time have I read to her by the hour, as she lay sick and suffering on her couch there."

The good woman's eyes filled with tears as she gazed round the familiar room.

"Was she long ill? Of what did she die?"

A shadow crossed the face of the housekeeper. "She was ill two years," she answered. "The doctors didn't all agree about her illness—she just faded away. Master Hugh is the very image of her."

She wanted to change the conversation. How could she tell this girl, with her fresh bright face, what she knew only too well, that her mistress had died of a broken heart?

"Hugh? Ah, he is my youngest step-brother, is he not? Do tell me about him. My father speaks much oftener of Walter. Are they alike?"

"Bless you, no," cried Mrs. Richardson warmly. "Why, my dear, they're as different as light from darkness. The master thinks all the world of Master Walter, and I will own he is a clever lad, but give me Master Hugh, with his open face and loving heart. Miss Davenant"—and here the housekeeper's voice became low and pleading—"that boy just worshipped his mother, and it's my opinion he's never got over her death. Perhaps the Lord has sent you here that you

may be the saving of him. He's one that needs love and sympathy."

"Me!" exclaimed Gwynneth. "But, Mrs. Richardson, he has his father and brother."

"Maybe, but neither of them understands him. The master and Master Walter are all of a piece, but Master Hugh is very reserved and shuts up his feeling in his own breast. But, as I said before, maybe you'll be the saving of him."

"I shall be only too glad to help him if I can," responded Gwynneth, as she fastened the book-case door with a click. "It seems quite funny to think I have brothers."

"God bless you, my dear, and never forget I'm always ready to help you all I can. And didn't you know you had any brothers?"

"No, never, until a few days ago."

A note of suppressed astonishment fell from the good woman's lips. "Certainly the master's a queer man," she thought to herself, as by and by she followed her young mistress downstairs. "First he surprises all of us by bringing home a daughter no one knew he possessed, and it seems he's surprised her quite as much by telling her she has two brothers, of whose existence she never heard! Well! well! it's a queer world."

Perhaps the good woman would have had even greater cause to make this remark had she guessed where her master spent most of the morning

following this conversation, while she and Gwynneth were seated in the old ivy-covered church at Eddlewood, whither the latter had accompanied her.

A wire from Mr. Davenant the previous evening announcing that he was unavoidably delayed in town, led to Gwynneth's dining alone, and consequently retiring early. Her father did not return that night, so she felt free to follow her own will, not knowing when he would appear. She wondered vaguely what kept him, but did not regret his absence, as it enabled her to go to church with Mrs. Richardson, for whom she was already beginning to feel a strong attachment.

Soon after her departure Mr. Davenant arrived, and after dismissing his motor and changing his clothes, he, too, walked towards Eddlewood, but not to the church.

Entering an avenue leading to a fine old red-brick gabled house, standing in the midst of beautifully laid out grounds, he ascended the flight of stone steps, and his loud ring soon brought a liveried footman to the door.

"Is Lady Alice in?" he enquired.

"Yes, sir; will you walk in?" and Mr. Davenant found himself ushered into a tastefully furnished drawing-room, where a fashionably dressed woman was reclining on a luxurious couch, a novel in her hand.

She started up on seeing her visitor and threw her book aside.

"Mr. Davenant!" she exclaimed. "Why, this is a surprise! Who would have thought of seeing you? Don't you know Jim calls you the Eddlewood hermit?"

Mr. Davenant laughed as he shook hands and then took a seat.

"Come, now, I believe it is over a year since you were here. Confess, isn't it true? There—I'm glad you owned up to it," and Lady Alice Farrant laughed lightly, and reseated herself amongst her cushions.

She was a gay, pleasure-loving little woman, with a kindly face, lit by round hazel eyes. Her husband, Sir James Farrant, K.C.B., was a retired Indian officer, and they were the wealthiest people in the neighbourhood, and consequently very popular. Although Sir James was a quiet, studious man, yet his gay little partner was never so happy as when she was entertaining and had the house filled with company.

"Don't you know you are very naughty?" she went on in her light bantering tone. "Have you forgotten this is Sunday, Mr. Davenant, and you should be at church?"

There was a hidden sneer in her voice, which made him reply:

"And why are *you* not there, Lady Alice?"



"Because I am as great a sinner as yourself ! Because I am not religious, and don't pretend to be, and, oh, dear, because—because—but, there, you understand."

He nodded. "Yes, I understand," he laughed. "And now, Lady Alice, for the object of my visit. I want your assistance."

"My assistance ! My dear Mr. Davenant, you make me quite curious. This is delightful ! Of course, I will gladly help you. Is it a bridge party, or private theatricals, or——"

"Oh, no, none of those sorts of things. It's about my daughter."

"Your daughter !" Her ladyship fairly gasped. "Why, Mr. Davenant, I thought you had only sons !"

"As most people think," he responded coolly. "But the fact is I married early—or rather, I was married previously, and have a daughter nineteen years of age. She has lived all her life in a little hole-and-corner village in Wales, with an old aunt who died only a month ago, and now I have brought her home. It's about her I came."

"Dear me, how very interesting ! And how very good of you to come and tell me all this ! I assure you I value your confidence. What is her name ? When may I see her ?"

"Her name is Gwynneth, it was her mother's ;

and as to seeing her, that can be as soon as you wish, but I have a favour to ask."

"Oh, do tell me what it is! Of course I shall say 'yes.'"

"The child has lived in this village, and consequently had few advantages. Her dress is—well—as if it came out of the Ark. I need not enlarge upon it. But being only a mere man I don't understand these things fully, except that I always know when a lady is well or badly dressed."

Lady Alice clapped her hands and went into fits of laughter.

"Capital! Capital!" she cried. "Now I grasp the situation. You want her fitted out, is it not so? Yes, I see I am right. What fun! Why, nothing would give me greater pleasure. I have not had the joy of choosing gowns and finery for a girl since poor dear Ethel went to India, and only to think she is gone, and dear knows who has appropriated her wardrobe—such a beautiful one; but Percy is sure never to have given a thought to such matters since her death, and after all, it's not a man's province, and the baby is quite as much as he can manage."

"You refer to your nephew, do you not?"

"Yes; it's only two years since he married. The child is just a year old; a fine boy, I am told. I want him to send him home to me."

She laughed. It sounded careless, and yet there was a hidden wistfulness in it which only a practised ear could detect. Few realized that this gay, thoughtless, butterfly woman of the world kept a secret sorrow hidden in her heart. She was childless, and her heartache was all the more bitter because she had never shared it with another. Ah, me! perhaps the world would have had less hold upon her, and her mind been lifted above the attractions of ballroom and theatre, race-course and card-parties, had she had the sanctifying influence of a little child at her knee, and baby hands to point her heavenward.

Few of us realize how much the world owes to the beautifying, purifying, and softening influences of God's child missionaries.

"Ah, a good idea," responded Mr. Davenant to his hostess' remarks. "But it's always a responsibility looking after other people's children. But you have plenty of servants, so it would not be much in the way."

"No," she murmured absently. "In the way!" How little this man knew how gladly she would give half, if not all, her wealth to have such an impediment! But, then, men are blind!

She roused herself. "Would you like me to take your daughter up to town and get her fitted out, Mr. Davenant?"

"Thank you warmly. It is just what I wanted. I know so few of the ladies about—none so suitable as you, Lady Alice; and so I gladly hand her over to you. I know you will do the thing well."

"I'll do my best," she responded. "Now, when shall we go—to-morrow? Yes; I am free, for a wonder. Shall I call for her at ten o'clock? We can catch the 10.15 to town, and make a day of it."

Mr. Davenant readily agreed, and then taking his note-book from his pocket, he laid four ten-pound notes on the table.

"This is to start with," he remarked. "Let me know when you want more." And he rose to go.

"I suppose you have heard that Captain Edgerton is expected home on leave?" observed Lady Alice as she rose also. "Of course, the General is delighted. I met him yesterday, and he could hardly contain himself. He is so proud of his son, and no wonder; the boy did well in South Africa, and has got his D.S.O.; but he is still a bit of an invalid—was wounded at Ladysmith, you remember."

"I believe I did hear something about it. Well, he will be quite an acquisition in the place, and always was popular; a nice genial fellow."

"Yes, and such a contrast to that quiet little

sister of his. I'm not sure it has improved her, being so intimate with the Elstons."

"Indeed; why, I thought Miss Margaret Elston was a great friend of yours? You have constantly had her at your parties."

"At my *dinner*-parties, Mr. Davenant, yes; she is so useful. I really don't know what I should do without her; for undoubtedly she is the best musician in the neighbourhood. It's a pity she is such a fanatic. Why, actually at my last dinner-party she got talking with Leonard Vallicker on religious subjects. Quite out of place, I consider it."

"Most of us are a little mad on something or other," laughed Mr. Davenant, as he bade his hostess farewell, and then went home well pleased that he had got his daughter in touch with such a woman of the world as Lady Alice Farrant.

## CHAPTER IX

### "THEY WRAP IT UP"

"Cowardice asks, Is it safe?  
Experience asks, Is it polite?  
Vanity asks, Is it popular?  
But Conscience asks, Is it right?"

W. M. PUNSHON.

"**I**ONE, dear, what is the matter?"

It was Sunday afternoon, the afternoon of the same day on which Mr. Davenant had paid his visit to Lady Alice, and the questioner was Margaret Elston.

Her clear grey eyes were gazing into a pair of large blue ones that wore a troubled expression and filled with tears as their owner met her friend's kindly but penetrating gaze.

"I'm very foolish, Margaret, and am finding out what a mixture I am. Have you heard that Douglas is coming home?"

"No. How nice for you all! How delighted you must all be!"

"Yes, we are looking forward to seeing him again. It is two years since he went to the front. I shiver to think of all he has gone through.

Margaret, sometimes I think I never ought to have been a soldier's daughter, I am such a coward. I hate wars and battles. I never even read about them if I can help it——"

"Except when a certain brother is in the thick of it, when, if I remember right, you pored over the daily papers for hours!"

"That was different. Of course, I had to find out all about Douglas and his surroundings. What I meant was I never like reading books about these things; not even about the Mutiny, although mother and dad went through it. You are laughing at me, Margaret. I can see the twinkle in your eye; and you don't believe me when I say I'm a coward; but I am, all the same."

There was a pathetic earnestness in Ione Edgerton's voice as she finished her confession; but Margaret still smiled as she took the woe-begone little face between her hands and kissed the sensitive mouth.

"I have never found you a coward, childie," she said.

"No, because I always feel so nice and comfortable and strong when I am near you. But when I am surrounded by a crowd of other people, like we meet at Lady Farrant's, I just sit and shiver. Every moment I expect to be asked to sing, and I know mother would like me to

sing some foolish love song, just because other people do and the tune is pretty, and I can't. I must at least sing sense, and there seem so few songs of that description ; and once, when we had two gentlemen to dinner and I had to sing, I sang Gounod's ' Green Hill,' and she was quite vexed with me after, said Dad didn't like it, and so on, and it was out of place ; but, Margaret, I felt as if I *must* sing it that night because one of our guests was Major Waberton ; and every one knows what he is, or rather was—just killing himself with drink—and it was the last time he dined with us ; he died less than a month after."

There was silence between the two, only that Margaret again kissed the little face, and Ione drew closer to her friend.

They were walking up and down the garden path of Margaret Elston's house. She was twenty-six, and was one of three sisters ; Irene was two years younger, while Minnie was twenty-eight. They lived with their widowed mother, and all three girls in their different ways were earnest workers for God. Margaret was the general favourite, being very bright and go-ahead, besides being a perfect musician ; but many preferred her younger sister Irene, with her big expressive brown eyes, wistful as a dog's, and her cropped hair, which curled all over her shapely head. A severe illness had necessitated



her losing her hair, and it had not grown long since. Minnie was the shy, retiring one of the family, who undertook the housekeeping and saw generally after everybody. She and Irene were usually together, while Margaret struck out a more independent path for herself.

The latter had a Sunday afternoon Bible-class, which girls and young women of all sorts and conditions attended, not only the entire staff of women servants from Oaklands (only the road divided the two properties), but servants from many of the houses round, as well as several shop assistants, and a few young ladies who were attracted by the earnestness and winsomeness of Margaret. Amongst these latter was Ione Edgerton, the only daughter of General Edgerton, whose handsome house was about a mile away. Ione, with all the warm-hearted impulsiveness of twenty summers, almost worshipped the ground upon which Margaret trod, while the latter was always ready to meet her with love and sympathy, always seeming to understand her difficulties, and never laughing at her penitent confessions.

"I am going to walk part of the way home with you," announced Margaret, looking at her watch. "I shall just have time to go as far as the bridge."

"Oh, that will be delightful!" exclaimed Ione.

"We haven't had a walk for such a long time, and now that Douglas is coming——"

"Well?"

"Oh, I suppose I shall have to go about a good deal with him, and—and——"

"And what, dear?"

"Oh, Margaret, I hate to say it, but do you know, I just dread his coming. I love him, oh, so dearly, but I can't forget how fond he always was of gaiety, dances, and theatre-going, and all that, and I am so frightened as to where I shall be taken, and whether he will laugh at me and tease me as much as he used to do."

Ione gave a little shiver and glanced up at her friend. They were quietly walking down the avenue which led to the high road, and would presently cross it and get into a field across which there was a footpath, a short cut to the girl's home.

Margaret felt the shiver, for Ione's hand had slipped inside her arm, and she drew her closer.

"Dearie, you have forgotten two things—first, that God never wants us to meet trouble beforehand, and, secondly, that we have to do with a God Who answers prayer."

"Yes, I know all that, but——"

"Knowing never brings us peace; it is only when we *act* upon what we know that rest

comes. Do you know, childie, that there are eighty 'Fear nots' in the Bible, and that every time you fear you break eighty commands?"

Ione opened her eyes wide. This was a new way of looking at things.

Margaret laughed. "There, think of that! So let all your fears go."

"But where?" asked the girl.

"To Jesus Christ. Lay them all down at His feet, and listen to His words of encouragement. Don't you remember 'Whoso hearkeneth unto Me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil'? Whenever I get discouraged or fearful, I always read the first chapter of Joshua. It's a capital tonic!"

Ione did not speak, but she was drinking in her friend's words.

"Then, again, remember how we have prayed for Douglas. Surely it is in answer to prayer that he has been spared, when so many have been killed at his side. He has been severely wounded and had enteric fever besides, and yet God has spared him. Is not this in answer to prayer?"

Ione nodded. Then she asked suddenly:

"How long have *you* prayed for Douglas, Margaret?"

Margaret coloured; but Ione was watching some sheep grazing in the field they were crossing, and did not notice it.

"For many years," she responded softly; and then they walked on silently, each busy with her own thoughts.

Memories of a time seven long years ago crowded into Margaret's mind, when she had first met Douglas Edgerton a bright, manly fellow of twenty. They had both been in the thick of the world then, Margaret just out of the schoolroom, throwing herself with all her heart into the gaieties of life, and earning admiration on all sides by her musical talents and bright girlish winsomeness. Amongst her many admirers none had so won his way with her as Douglas Edgerton, and by now she might have been his wife, had not an event occurred which changed the whole current of her life. A mission was held in their parish church, and though at first she and her sisters, as well as Douglas Edgerton, went out of curiosity, other influences drew her before long. For the first time Margaret Elston saw herself as she really was, a lost sinner in the sight of God. She had been carefully brought up, and had been both baptized and confirmed, and was a regular communicant; but none of these things gave her peace once she was brought face to face with the claims of God. The missionary, a truly Spirit-filled man of God, was not long in noticing the three attractive-looking girls who came so

regularly to the services, and seemed so really interested. It was not long before he contrived to have a word with them, and his keen glance and quiet direct questions soon drew from Margaret the truthful reply that she did not know the joy of forgiven sin. The girl's earnestness and evident distress appealed to the kind clergyman. Ernest Beverley was a true soul-winner and one much used of God, and so, Bible in hand, he sat down by her side and proceeded to make as clear to her as possible the claims of God, showing her from the Word of God that if she would be saved it must be in God's way, and that repentance, that is turning away from and giving up sin, and faith in Christ were both essential to salvation. Then began the struggle; for although Margaret was only nineteen, she was honest enough to see that if she would be Christ's, she could not have two masters. The world, with all its pleasures, rose up before her, while on the other side she beheld the Lamb of God, crucified and hated by the world, and claiming her by the purchase of His own life-blood. All the time Mr. Beverley was speaking to her she never made any reply, but she started when he suddenly asked, "Is there anything between your soul and God that prevents you accepting God's gift of salvation through Christ? Anything that

rises up before you when you would come to Him ? "

" Yes, there is," replied the girl slowly.

" Then will you let it go ? " he asked gently, his keen eyes seeming to read her inmost thoughts.

The girl remained silent, and Mr. Beverley rose.

" *You* know the hindrance," he said quietly, " and I can do no more, except to ask you to go home and get alone with God. He will deal with you. ' See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh, ' " and having shaken hands with her, he turned away.

Margaret rose and slowly walked down the aisle of the church. Her sisters had gone home before. She had purposely stayed behind to have a word with the missionary. What was her surprise to find Douglas Edgerton waiting for her at the door, a frown on his handsome face.

" Ah, here you are at last ! " he exclaimed. " What an unconscionable time you have been, and whatever was that fellow saying to you ? "

" What I wish some one had said to me years ago," burst forth the girl. " For the first time some one has spoken to me personally about my soul, and I see I'm all wrong."

" Fiddlesticks and nonsense ! " cried Douglas. " The man's a fanatic. Now look here, Margaret,

just to please you I have been coming to this blessed mission, and beastly uncomfortable it has made me. Why, I never heard such a text as that fellow preached from, 'They wrap it up'! I tell you it's turned me clean inside out, and I don't like it and won't stand it, so there. Not another service for me," and the young officer angrily flicked with his cane some bushes growing by the wayside.

"Oh, Douglas, don't say that!" exclaimed Margaret, putting her hand on his arm and gazing earnestly into his face. "I thought Mr. Beverley spoke to you too."

"That's just what he did do," retorted the young man in angry tones. "There was I sitting waiting for you, when all of a sudden I found him at my elbow, and he dared to ask me if I knew Jesus Christ as my own personal Saviour. I was never so taken aback in my life. Did he take me for a heathen? I just told him to mind his own business, and you should have seen the way he looked as he said, 'Young man, that's just what I am doing.' He made me feel quite small. Catch me going near him again."

They had reached Margaret's home, and she held out her hand.

"Good night," was all she said. "I am seeking Christ, Douglas, and I hoped you were too." Then she was gone.

He turned homewards, his heart sore and troubled. He had learned to love this bright winsome girl, and to have her "turn religious," as he termed it, was gall and wormwood to him. An only son, petted and indulged from his childhood, and surrounded by every luxury in a thoroughly refined and worldly home, he resented with all his might the earnest, straightforward words that had fallen from the lips of the preacher, whose God-given messages had filled him with anger and resentment. "They wrap it up—they wrap it up," he kept repeating to himself as he made his way homeward, and did his utmost to put away the impression the text had made. Ah! how many things in his past life had he not wrapped up? No wonder he dreaded bringing them to the light. That night, alone in her room, kneeling by her bedside, Margaret Elston had poured out her difficulties at the Saviour's feet. A great hungry need had been growing inside her, stronger and stronger as the days went by, and she had sat listening to the invitations and messages given by the missionary. She had thought herself all right, and happy, and satisfied, until God's claims had met her, and the love and patience of a crucified Saviour, crucified for *her*, Margaret Elston, had been pressed home upon her. *Now* she saw the difference between *profession* and *possession*, and that outward rites



and ceremonies do not constitute true religion, but that God demands heart worship and life allegiance. Long and earnestly she prayed and counted the cost. It was not love of the world that kept her from closing with God's offer. How paltry seemed the world's pleasures since she had obtained a glimpse of what she might have in Christ! No. It was something else, something which she had never mentioned to a human soul, a secret safe locked in her own bosom. That night Margaret found out how dear Douglas Edgerton was to her. True, he had never asked her to be his wife, but her woman's instinct told her that he would do so before long, and full well she knew what her answer would be, yes, if only this mission had not come. From what had occurred on their homeward walk, she saw how resolutely Douglas was withstanding the strivings of God's Spirit with him, and she felt she could not marry one who had not decided for Christ, if she herself had done so. Again and again the tempter came to her and told her the sacrifice was too great, that God did not demand it, that she could be a Christian and yet link her life with one who was not, and that she might by doing so win him over too. But deep down in her heart Margaret knew all such reasonings were not of God. With her Bible open before her she turned up passage after

passage which showed her what God's commands were : " Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." " Can two walk together except they be agreed ? " Long and fiercely the battle raged. This girl was no weak character, but one with a determined will and deep affections, and it was no light matter to weigh a question upon the settlement of which hung her life's happiness. Time after time she turned and re-turned the pages of her Bible, seeking for some loophole through which to escape from the convictions which held her heart in thrall. But she found none.

Suddenly, long after midnight, when she was feeling spent and weak with the conflict, her Bible slipped from her hand and fell open. Her eye fell on the page ; it was the 25th of Second Chronicles, and her eye travelled listlessly down the column of verses. Surely there would be no message for her in such a book, filled mostly with the accounts of kings and their doings. But what was it that so suddenly arrested her ? Only the latter part of the ninth verse : "*The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.*"

She gazed at the words spellbound, then with a smothered cry buried her face in her hands, and flung herself forward against the bed. Her eyes were opened at last, her choice was made,

"the still small voice" was heard in all its sweetness, and Margaret Elston could say—

"Behind my back I fling,  
Like an unvalued thing,  
My former self and ways;  
And reaching forward far,  
I seek the things that are  
Beyond time's lagging days."

It was a very wistful pair of eyes that met those of the missionary that night, as again Margaret sat in the old church listening to the messages of life; but a calm restfulness was there too, and joy, which did not escape Mr. Beverley's quick eye, and his questioning: "You have something to tell me, Miss Elston?" as he shook hands with her after the service was over, at once received the ready response: "Yes, Mr. Beverley, I have yielded to God's claims, and taken Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Master."

"Praise God!" exclaimed the minister. "May He bless and keep you. Remember, you have always a Saviour Who is able to save you to the uttermost. Launch out on Him, trust and obey."

A warm handshake, and he had passed on; but going home the girl felt as if she was treading on air. Her first public confession of Christ had flooded her soul "with joy unspeakable and full of glory," and the cry went up from her heart: "Oh, Lord, use me to win others to Thee."

How different was that homeward walk from the one she had taken the previous evening, and if her heart gave a pang as she thought of Douglas Edgerton and his words, her sorrow was outweighed by the new joy that was now hers.

She knew he had gone out to a dinner-party that night, and would not be at the service. She was half glad and half sorry—sorry that he had lost another opportunity of hearing of a Saviour's pardoning love, but glad that no disturbing voice was at hand to mar her happiness. But the next morning while she was in the garden gathering roses with which to replenish the flower vases in the drawing-room, a quick, firm step fell on her ear, and Douglas stood beside her. Then Margaret knew her first difficulty had come.

"Oh, I have found you!" he exclaimed. "They said they thought you were in the garden, and I've come to ask you to join a picnic we are making up to go down the river to Hampton Court. You won't refuse me, I know."

How boyish and handsome he looked as she lifted her eyes to his face, and she saw something there the meaning of which she knew full well.

"Come," he continued, not noticing her silence. "I want to get you away from all this preaching and psalm-singing you've been stuffing your head with these last ten days. I declare

that wretched fellow's words about 'they wrap it up' have been dinning in my ears ever since. I wish I'd never heard him. Wasn't I thankful to be at a jolly dinner-party last night, instead of in that old church! No more of that for me."

He threw back his head and laughed, and then his eye fell on the sad, wistful gaze of the girl beside him. That sobered him.

"There! There! Don't look like that, Margaret! I wouldn't hurt you for worlds; but that Beverley does go a bit too far, doesn't he now?"

"No," replied Margaret steadily. "I would he had gone even further, if by so doing he had reached you, and drawn you into the fold of Christ."

Something in the earnestness of her tones startled him.

"Margaret," he exclaimed in a low, surprised voice, "you haven't—haven't——"

"I have decided to take God's precious gift of eternal life, by faith in His Son Jesus Christ, and I have given myself to Him for ever and ever."

There was a glad ring in her voice and a brightness in her eyes as she looked fearlessly into his. He felt staggered.

"Margaret! Margaret!" he cried, as he

seized her hands, "don't talk like that. Do you know what brought me here this morning? It was to ask you to make me the happiest man on earth, to say you will be my wife, but now——"

"But now it cannot be," she went on slowly. "It is kind of you, Douglas, oh, *so* kind, and—and——" Her lips trembled, and she paused.

"And you love me!" he cried. "Yes, I know it, I see it in your eyes. Oh, Margaret, this is only a passing fancy, it won't last. Besides, you may be as religious as you like; religion is meant for women. Only, only say you will be mine."

But Margaret shook her head.

"No, Douglas, I cannot. Don't think I do not love you. God knows I do. But I dare not marry you. Unless a husband and wife are absolutely one in the highest and most important matters, their life cannot be a truly happy one. 'Can two walk together except they be agreed?'"

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed the young man angrily. "You don't really love me, Margaret, in spite of all you say. You are bewitched, bewitched, I say, and I wish that fellow Beverley and the vicar and all his crew were at Jericho!"

"But that would not make any difference. The truths they teach will remain unchanged. Oh, Douglas, I can never, never thank God enough for sending Mr. Beverley here. This mission has brought *life* to me and to many;

"She said you were sensible in going to bed," answered Irene promptly. "But I'm so thankful you're better. Do you think you'll be well enough to come to the mission to-night? It's the last night."

"Yes, I know, and I'm quite well enough, and wouldn't miss it for anything. Oh, Irene, hasn't it been lovely, darling?"

"I don't know—hardly that," she answered slowly; and Margaret, looking at her, saw her sister's eyes were filled with tears. Then in a flash she guessed why she had come to look for her.

"My darling," she said, sitting up and kissing the troubled face, "haven't you yet found Jesus?"

For answer Irene buried her face in her sister's bosom and burst into tears.

"No, no, I haven't, and I want to ever so badly. I guessed by your face at breakfast this morning that something had happened to you, you looked so happy and peaceful, whereas you had been looking so grave and troubled for days. And I longed to ask you, but I had to hurry off to my lessons, and I've been wanting you all day. Oh, Margaret, help me, do!"

And so Margaret, in tender, loving tones, told her story, and how she had entered the kingdom. It was her first personal testimony, but God

blessed it, and before they went down to tea both sisters had knelt side by side, and Margaret had won her first soul for Christ.

Truly there were no two happier souls in the church that night than those two sisters; and when later on Minnie confessed to having found Christ too, although at the time she had said nothing about it, they all rejoiced together.

Margaret had never breathed to a soul what had passed between her and Douglas Edgerton. His regiment had been ordered abroad soon after, and now after seven years she heard with mingled feelings that he was on his way to his old home again.

Ione, well pleased to have the company of her much-loved friend, chatted freely as they walked across the fields towards her home, then at the half-way bridge they parted, and the former hastened on, well knowing her father's dislike to any unpunctuality at the tea hour.

But Margaret stood on the rustic bridge which spanned the rippling waters of the Eddle as they hastened to meet the Thames two miles further on. She gazed down into the brown stream. How gently it flowed, and how unlikely it seemed that it could ever become a rushing, roaring waterway, given to overflowing its banks at flood tides, when the autumn and winter rains made it dangerous to cross. But her thoughts



were far away, for one cry was in her heart, "Douglas is coming home."

"Can you tell me if this is a short cut to Eddlewood?"

Margaret started. A slight, brown-eyed girl, dressed in mourning, stood on the bank watching her.

"Oh, yes," she answered brightly. "I suppose you came round by the road? That is much further."

"Yes," replied Gwynneth, for it was she. "I went for a stroll, it was such a lovely afternoon, and I've walked miles. Then I saw this pathway, and thought it must be a shorter way. I'm glad I was right."

"I'm going back to Eddlewood. Shall we walk together?" asked Margaret.

"Thank you, I should like it very much," and so the two joined company, each wondering who the other might be.

"I think you are a stranger here?" remarked Margaret.

"Yes, I came only a few days ago. It seems a pretty country, but I do miss the sea."

"Ah, your home is near the sea. Then this inland scenery must appear quite tame. But some of the views round are really beautiful. My youngest sister has made some lovely sketches from places close by."

"How nice! I wish I could paint; I do so love pictures. But I know so little of anything."

"You are not very old," responded Margaret, with a merry laugh; "there's plenty of time to learn. I like to think we can always go on learning more and more. I'm twenty-six, and I've just started a new study; you'll never guess what it is. Greek! Doesn't it sound fearfully learned? But I am taking it up because I want to read the New Testament in the original. And it's such a wonderful language, quite different from our prosaic English; every word seems a storehouse of wealth, full of all sorts of hidden, wonderful meanings. Oh, I love it already."

Gwynneth listened to this speech with wide-open eyes. She had felt drawn to this bright, happy-looking girl, but the idea of her knowing Greek frightened her.

"You must be very clever," she observed.

"Clever? Oh, dear, no. I've just got the usual amount of brains supplied to women in general. Do you know I'm more and more convinced that there are very few geniuses in the world, but that the chief work of the world is done by people who are not extra clever, but who have made the most of the talents with which God has entrusted them. Every one has *one* talent, many people two and three, but only

those who use them find them merged into 'seven talents more.'"

Gwynneth sighed. She was wondering if she had more than one talent, and if so, what they were. But she said nothing.

"Well?" said Margaret, a smile rippling all over her face, "have you found it out?"

"Found it out? Found what out?" asked the puzzled Gwynneth.

"If you have more than one talent, and if so, what they are."

Gwynneth burst out laughing.

"How did you know my thoughts?" she exclaimed.

"Not very difficult. I am used to reading faces, and I love girls. Now may I take the liberty of asking another question? What is your name, and where do you live?"

They had reached the high road, and Gwynneth for answer pointed up the avenue to her father's house.

"I am Mr. Davenant's daughter," she said simply.

Margaret started. "Indeed! I did not know he had a daughter, only sons."

"My mother was his first wife. I have lived all my life in Wales with my aunt. She died lately," and Gwynneth glanced at her black apparel.

"Well," responded Margaret, holding out her hand, "my name is Margaret Elston, and we live just over the way. As we are such near neighbours, I hope we shall be friends. May I come and see you?"

"Oh, do; I should be delighted."

"Very well. Shall I come to-morrow?"

"No, not to-morrow. My father has made arrangements for me to go up to London with some Lady Tarrant or Farrant, who is to choose new clothes for me. I wish it were over. I don't like going with strangers; but I must go."

"Yes, but never mind. Suppose I call Tuesday or Wednesday, then you'll have all the account of your shopping to tell me. I expect you'll enjoy it." And with a bright smile and nod she was gone, while Gwynneth made her way slowly homewards, well pleased with her new acquaintance.

"Mother," exclaimed Margaret, twenty minutes later, as she and her sisters gathered round the tea-table, "I've made a discovery."

Mrs. Elston smiled. She was a handsome old lady, with kindly face and snowy hair, and a ready sympathizer with all the joys and sorrows of her children.

"You're always making discoveries," laughed Irene. "Another girl, I suppose."

"Yes; but you'll never guess who it is. Did

any of you ever hear that Mr. Davenant had a daughter ? ”

Her three listeners gazed at her in astonishment.

“ My dear, you’ve made a mistake,” said Mrs. Elston gently.

“ No, I haven’t, mother dear ; he has a daughter ; she looks about nineteen or twenty. I walked home from the bridge with her. She is living with him, and told me she is the child of his first wife.”

“ How extraordinary ! ” exclaimed Minnie Elston ; “ but he is a very strange man. Every one seems to know him in a kind of way, but no one really does. He’s always coming and going. Fancy his having a daughter and no one knowing it ! ”

“ I dare say he had some good reason for keeping it secret,” remarked Mrs. Elston, who hated gossip. “ Anyhow, I’m very glad she has come. Of course, you will call, my dear ? ”

“ Yes, I told her I’d call Tuesday or Wednesday,” replied Margaret, “ and she seemed delighted. I’ll bring her over to tea some day, mother ; I’m sure you’ll like her.”

“ Do, my dear,” and then the conversation drifted into other channels, until the church bells reminded them it was time for evening service.

Never to the end of her life did Gwynneth forget her experience of the following day. True to her word Lady Farrant drove up at an early hour and bore her off to the railway station. Her father had already well filled her purse, and the hour's journey to town soon passed, and Gwynneth found herself for the first time in the great capital. A hansom was hailed and engaged for three hours, and then Gwynneth's miseries began. From shop to shop they drove, and the girl underwent such measuring and fitting as never before, until she began to wonder if she were a creature of flesh and blood, or just a lay figure to be pulled about and discussed at the will of her ladyship. Gown after gown was chosen, morning dresses, walking dresses, evening dresses, blouses of all sorts and makes, underlinen such as Gwynneth had never possessed. It was useless for her to demur. Lady Farrant only smiled and said Mr. Davenant had given her *carte blanche* to fit out his daughter in the most becoming style; and when at last two o'clock came and the hansom finally landed them at the door of a beautifully appointed restaurant, and was dismissed, Gwynneth, as she entered the softly carpeted dining-room, felt almost too weary to eat.

"I fear I have overtired you, my dear," observed her vivacious little ladyship. "I see

you are not used to shopping. Never mind, you will be better when you have had lunch," and then a waiter was called, and her orders given.

Yes, Gwynneth did feel better after lunch ; but her head was aching, and the ceaseless coming and going of the people round her only made it worse.

"Our train does not leave until five o'clock," announced Lady Farrant, when, lunch concluded, she began leisurely pulling on her gloves. "Now, what would you like to do—go to a picture gallery or for a drive in the Park?"

"Oh, the Park, please!" exclaimed Gwynneth, the very idea of looking at pictures being too much for her aching head.

So another hansom was called, and once more they sallied forth, and the girl had another glimpse of London life.

Once in the open air she began to revive, and presently became absorbed in the horses and carriages, with their gaily dressed occupants, which passed them continually. Lady Farrant was well pleased to point out places of interest as they went along, and once in the Park was able to give her a tolerable amount of information as to the various occupants of the handsome carriages they passed.

"Look, my dear, here is the Countess of Grantley, one of the beauties of the day, only

married six months ago, an American, of course, and enormously rich. And in that carriage following, do you see a widow lady with a lovely boy ? That is poor Lord Wichett's widow, and the little fellow is her only child. It must be dreadful to have an only child ; one must live in a continual state of terror lest something will happen to it ; and if there is a property in the question, it's enough to turn one's hair grey. Ah, here comes Ellen Terry, one of our greatest actresses, you know, and riding behind her is General Large and his daughter Ethel. There, he has seen us," as the fine-looking old officer raised his hat. " He will wonder whatever brings *me* into the Park like this. How I wish I could introduce you to Ethel ; she is a charming girl, and splendid at riding to hounds."

And so the little woman ran on, never noticing her companion's silence, but well pleased to let her tongue wag, so long as she had an interested listener.

An hour quickly passed, and they had just time to get a cup of tea at the station waiting-room before their train started, and Gwynneth was thankful to find herself hurrying away from the great city with its unending life-throbs into the quieter regions of her country home.

Her father was on the doorstep to welcome



her, and thank Lady Farrant for her kind guardianship of his daughter.

"Not a word, Mr. Davenant, not a word!" she exclaimed, as, having unloaded her brougham of its marvellous supply of boxes and parcels, she prepared to drive off. "We have had a lovely day, haven't we, my dear? And I only hope you won't think me frightfully extravagant. I'm sure your daughter does!"

And with this parting thrust she drove away, and Gwynneth entered the hall with her father.

"Tired, child?" he asked, as he noticed her white face and lagging gait. "You'll be glad of dinner. Don't stop to dress. You can tell me all about it after."

And Gwynneth gladly made her way upstairs, and having refreshed herself with soap and water, threw herself upon the couch in her sitting-room until the gong should summon her to dinner. She felt better after her rest; but Lady Farrant's prodigality weighed heavy on her soul. Did her father know how lavishly that little person had bought right and left every sort of finery, even down to lace stockings and satin shoes?

"Father," she said, dinner being over and the two left to themselves, "I feel I must tell you I cannot approve of the way Lady Farrant does her shopping."

"And why not, pray?" he asked cheerfully.

"She has bought me such piles and piles of things; no less than five dresses, and quite a dozen blouses, to say nothing of boots and shoes, and hats and gloves and ribbons, enough to last me a lifetime. I am very sorry, but I couldn't stop her. She only laughed if I said anything, and said she knew you would approve."

Mr. Davenant laughed. "My dear Gwynneth, don't trouble your little head about such matters. I gave Lady Farrant a supply of money, and promised her as much more as she needed. I am not a poor man, Gwynneth, thank heavens, no. I never could bear to be that, and I want my only daughter to dress as befits her station in life. You are the head of my house, you know, and I wish you to dress well. I am going to give you £100 a year pocket money. Out of that you can dress yourself. I suppose it will be sufficient, since, according to your account, our good friend has set you up for life!"

Gwynneth's face grew crimson. A hundred a year! It was a small fortune, and the grateful eyes she turned on her father showed him his generosity was not thrown away.

"There, I'm glad you're pleased," he replied in response to her words of thanks. "Now get out of black as soon as possible. I can't bear it. And, remember, if ever you want a friend to

advise you, you can't do better than go to Lady Farrant. She's a thorough woman of the world, and good-natured withal."

But that night as Gwynneth lay in her little bed going over the events of the day, and recalling her father's words, she murmured to herself :

"Lady Farrant may be very kind, and may know a lot, but she's not the sort of woman I could ever trust or make a friend of. If I want a friend I'd choose that sweet-faced Margaret Elston ; that's the sort of face *I* like. There's such a lot in it ; and I'm glad to think she's coming to see me to-morrow."

But Margaret did not come on the morrow. All the morning Gwynneth was busy sorting her new possessions and putting them away, and in the afternoon she strolled into the garden with a book, leaving word where she was to be found should Margaret call.

The latter, however, had had to go on a message for her mother, and it was too late when she returned to make her way to Oaklands ; so it was not until the following afternoon that she paid her promised visit, and when she did so she was not alone, for she brought Ione Edgerton with her. Gwynneth, who was in the garden, came forward to greet them with outstretched hands.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come," she cried.



Gwynneth quite enjoyed playing the rôle of hostess (page 165)



"I was expecting you all yesterday afternoon, and——"

She stopped on seeing Ione.

"I could not come, dear," replied Margaret ;  
"but I have made up for it to-day by bringing  
a friend with me, whom I want to be your friend  
too," and then she turned and introduced the  
two girls.

They looked at one another and smiled, and  
the brown eyes and blue eyes met and seemed  
to understand.

"I am so glad to see you both," said Gwynneth.  
"Shall we go in, or would you rather stay out  
here ?"

"Oh, out here, please," exclaimed both her  
visitors at once. "This garden is perfectly sweet,  
and we shall not have many more days like this.  
It's wonderful weather for October. What the  
Americans would call an Indian summer, I  
suppose."

They seated themselves under a beautiful old  
oak and chatted on, and then tea was brought  
out, and Gwynneth quite enjoyed playing the  
rôle of hostess, only regretting that owing to  
expected visitors Margaret's visit had to be a  
short one.

"I'm going to leave Ione behind, to keep  
you company," she said as she rose to go ; "and  
another day I hope to pay a longer visit. But it

will be your turn to come to us next, and mother is wishing to make your acquaintance. Now, when can you come? Friday? Oh, I'm so glad; then we will expect you; and come early, and we'll have some tennis."

A smile and hearty handshake and she was gone, and both girls watched her departure with wistful eyes.

"Isn't she a darling!" exclaimed Ione Edgerton, as Margaret's tussore dress disappeared behind the shrubs. "She's the dearest friend I have. I don't know what I'd do without her."

"Yes, she seems very sweet. I have never met any one like her," responded Gwynneth. "But, then, I've seen so few people. Our village was such a tiny one, and made up nearly altogether of poor people."

"How nice! Then you never lived in fear and dread of horrid invitations to dinner-parties and whist-drives and bridge-parties and all those sorts of things? That's what they have here, and I just hate them."

Gwynneth's eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"Is that what they have here?" she said slowly. "Oh, how sorry I am that I have come!"

## CHAPTER XI

### A DISCOVERED TALENT

"I see not a step before me as I tread on another year,  
But the past is still in God's keeping, and the future His  
mercy will clear,  
And what looks dark in the distance, may brighten as it  
draws near."

IONE'S eyes softened.

"Oh, don't say that!" she exclaimed wistfully, laying her small hand on Gwynneth's arm. "I'm so glad you've come. I have a sort of feeling we are going to be friends. And, then, Margaret has brought us together. She told me how she met you. And when Margaret brings people together, they generally keep on."

Gwynneth smiled at this mixed speech, but quite understood it and took Ione's hand accordingly.

"You see," continued the latter, "though Margaret is my best and dearest friend, she's years older than I am. She's twenty-six, and I'm only just twenty, so you and I are nearer of an age, aren't we?"



"Yes," responded Gwynneth. "I shall be nineteen next week." And she sighed.

"Next week! How nice! You're going to have a birthday. Will you have a party?"

"No; it will be a sad day for me, the first birthday without my dear aunt," and the girl's brown eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" exclaimed Ione, coming over and throwing her arm caressingly round her new friend. "Now, I'll tell you what we'll do, you shall spend the day with me. That is"—and she hesitated—"if Douglas hasn't come. What day is your birthday?"

"October the 30th, next Tuesday."

"Capital—it just fits!" cried Ione, clapping her hands. "Father and mother are going up that very day to London to meet Douglas. They'll spend the night there, as they are not sure what time he'll get up from Southampton. I shall be all alone, so you'll take pity on me, won't you, and come over to lunch and spend the rest of the day with me? Do say you will."

What could Gwynneth do but accept an invitation so heartily given, and already her birthday seemed to have less sadness about it when it rose before her mind.

The girls sat on chatting, Gwynneth telling all about her old home and life at Cemaes,

and Ione, in return, giving all sorts of information about her home and neighbourhood.

"How nice to have a soldier brother!" said Gwynneth in response to Ione's description of the absent Douglas, and his expected homecoming. "It seems so strange to me to think I have never seen either of my brothers, but I suppose you have. Tell me, what are they like?"

"Not a bit like each other," replied Ione promptly. "Walter is dark, like your father, and Hugh is fair, like what his mother was. He's such a nice boy, and was so devoted to his mother. She was sweet, every one said, but I only met her once or twice."

Gwynneth sighed again. "I wish I had known her," she said. "I think we'd have been friends."

"Yes, I believe you would. And now I must be going; but you won't forget Tuesday?"

The two girls walked down the avenue together, and then Ione waved a farewell and turned into the fields, taking the short cut to her home, while Gwynneth returned to the house, a smile upon her face.

"Father," she observed at dinner that evening, "I've had two invitations to-day. Aren't you surprised?"

"Indeed I am. You seem to be picking up friends. Who are they, pray?"

"One is a Miss Margaret Elston. I believe

they live just opposite at Pine Grove. She has asked me to tea and tennis on Friday. And the other is Miss Edgerton, who wants me to spend Tuesday with her."

At the mention of Margaret's name a not too pleased expression passed over Mr. Davenant's face, but it cleared at the sound of Ione's name.

"Ah, both nice families, but don't get too taken up with the Elstons. They are all right, perfect gentlefolk, but a bit fanatical; and if there's a thing I detest it's your religious people who think it sin to do anything but go to church and say prayers. The Edgertons, of course, are not that sort. The old General is a fine old fellow, seen a lot of service; and I'm glad you've met his daughter. She must be about your age. There's a son, too, just coming home, after being away in India and South Africa for nearly seven years. He used to be a nice fellow. Yes, I'm glad you should know them."

So it was with a feeling of her father's approval Gwynneth set out for Pine Grove on Friday afternoon.

The weather had changed, and instead of the warm summer-like day when Margaret had visited her, Gwynneth met a sharp wind with hints of coming rain. But a game of tennis was managed, and she was glad to find Ione one of the party.

Gwynneth had hardly ever played tennis, but her kind friends insisted on her trying, and were so considerate and gave her such encouragement that she soon grew more confident, and threw herself heart and soul into the game. Then when it was over they went indoors, and Gwynneth fell in love with Mrs. Elston on the spot; the sweet placid face, with its setting of snowy hair, captivated her.

"I think she's the loveliest old lady I've ever seen," she confided to Ione in an undertone, as the two sat together in the wide old window-seat, sipping their tea.

Ione nodded. "And that's why she's got such charming daughters," she answered with a smile.

"What are you two so confidential over?" remarked Irene Elston, coming over to their part of the room. "You look like two old ladies bent on gossip, 'happy and cappy,' the Vicar would say!"

The girls laughed merrily. "I don't know where the caps come in," replied Ione, "but I can answer for the happiness. Is Margaret going to play for us after tea, Irene?"

"If you wish it, I'm sure she will."

Gwynneth's eyes brightened, a fact not lost on her hostess.

"You are fond of music, Miss Davenant?"

"Oh, very!" exclaimed Gwynneth; "and I had such a treat lately. My father took me to hear the 'Elijah' when we passed through Birmingham. I never heard anything so beautiful in my life. It was just like heaven."

Her listeners smiled.

"Margaret, come here," called Irene to her sister, who was passing. "Here is something that will interest you. Miss Davenant heard the 'Elijah' lately for the first time, and says it's just like heaven. Do you agree with that?"

Margaret smiled.

"Yes, it is heavenly music."

"Then give us some of it," said Irene. "That is, if you've finished your tea," and the request was taken up on all sides.

So Margaret went over to the grand piano, and opening it began to play. She needed no music, but began in slow, soft tones one of Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words," gliding from it into a sonata of Beethoven's, and then into other airs. The twilight was falling, and Gwynneth sat as if in a dream. She had never heard playing like this, and when at last "O rest in the Lord" floated across the room, she buried her face in her hands, and let the words which fell from Margaret's lips sink into her soul.

A full half-hour had passed since the music began, but no one had heeded the time. Now.

however, as the player rose, the few visitors who had been present rose too, with words of genuine thanks as they bade their hostess farewell.

Ione and Gwynneth rose also, the former saying the Woods had kindly offered to give her a seat in their carriage.

Gwynneth made her way to old Mrs. Elston's side, and held out her hand.

"Must you go, my dear?" asked the old lady. "Why, I'm quite disappointed. I have seen nothing of you; but I must not be selfish, your father will be wanting you, no doubt."

"Oh, no, father is away this evening; but I have been here such a long time, I——"

"Your father away?" broke in the old lady. "Why, then, there is no need for you to hurry. Margaret, Irene, here is Miss Davenant wanting to run away, and her father not at home. Get her to stay the evening."

It did not require much pressure to induce Gwynneth to remain, specially as Margaret observed:

"Now we can have some more music. Do you play, Miss Davenant?"

"Not very much, at least the piano," she answered.

"Not the piano? Then what do you play?"

"The violin a little," said Gwynneth shyly.

"But—but—it's not like your playing," she added.

Margaret laughed. "Why, I don't play the violin at all," she said. "It's delightful to have found some one who does; no one seems to round here. Do let me send across for yours; may I?"

"If you'll allow me, I'll run across myself and fetch it, and then I can tell the servants I shall be out for the evening."

So it was arranged, and in less than twenty minutes Gwynneth was back, carrying her beloved violin, her cheeks pink with excitement.

"I haven't touched it since I left home," she remarked, as with trembling hands she took it out of its case.

"Home!" observed Minnie Elston, laughing. "Why, I thought your home was at Oaklands?"

"I forgot," replied Gwynneth, and then added in an undertone, "Cemaes will always be home to me."

But only Margaret heard it.

"Now," said the latter, in her quick, brisk way, "now let us have a duet," and she began turning over the music Gwynneth had brought. In a few minutes the violin was tuned, and with slow, trembling fingers Gwynneth began. But the quiet confidence and smile of her companion reassured her, and presently she forgot everything

in the joy of having one to accompany her who was so fully in sympathy.

"Child, where have you learned?" exclaimed Margaret, wheeling round on her music-stool as soon as their first attempt ended.

"I learned first at Cemaes. When I was six years old a gentleman stayed at Cemaes for his health, a musician, and we got to know him, as Auntie knew friends of his who asked her to call. He constantly came to our house, and found out I loved music, and he gave me my first violin and lessons every day all through the winter. He came for three years, and then he died, and I had got on so well that Auntie thought I ought to continue learning, and so took me twice a week to Bangor for lessons. But that is all the teaching I have had."

Margaret looked at her keenly. "Tell your father, Miss Davenant, that I said the best thing he can do is to get you violin lessons without delay."

"Oh, do I play so badly!" exclaimed the girl, a look of dismay overspreading her face.

"Nonsense, dear! Quite the other way. Your music is worth cultivating. Considering the few advantages you have had (and I suppose you have heard no great violinists), your playing is wonderful. Will you come over and practise with me daily? And if Mr. Davenant will get



you lessons, tell him I know of a first-class master in London."

"But I could not go up alone."

"I go up every week, so you could come up with me."

"Oh, that would be delightful! But I don't think I can screw up my courage to give your message to my father. I hardly seem to know him yet."

A tender look swept over Margaret's face, but she only said :

"Well, I shall tell him, if I get the chance ; meanwhile, you come over and practise with me."

So it was arranged, and then began some of the happiest hours Gwynneth had ever spent ; and many a girl in Eddlewood would have envied her the good fortune of having such an instructress as Margaret Elston, whose playing was well known.

When Gwynneth told her father he seemed pleased, and said at once : "Ah, I remember Dr. Hughes did mention you played the violin, but I had forgotten it. Would you like to have lessons ? "

"Oh, father, I'd love it ! " exclaimed Gwynneth ; "and Miss Elston says if you want to know of a good teacher, she knows one she can thoroughly recommend in London, and I could

go up to town with her, as she goes up every week."

Mr. Davenant did not reply. He was turning over in his mind the fact that this would throw his daughter very much in contact with girls who were decidedly religious. Would she get infected? But, then, what an advantage for her to have Margaret's help with her music, and he could counteract the influence in other ways; so he told Gwynneth to get the name of Miss Elston's teacher, and before long all arrangements were made, and the girl started under a well-known violin master.

Herr Rosenthall did not say much, but both Margaret (who had accompanied Gwynneth to her first lesson) and Gwynneth saw he was pleased with his new pupil, and when at his bidding she continued playing and gradually lost her nervousness, he commenced muttering under his breath:

"Es ist aus-gezeichmt! es ist vortrefflich!"  
("It is exquisite! It is excellent!")

Gwynneth, who did not understand a word he said, looked hopelessly at Margaret. The latter laughed.

"The Professor is only saying he approves of your performance," she explained, and then followed an animated talk between Margaret and the German, all in his native tongue, which

Margaret understood perfectly, and he only too well pleased to be able to air his opinion in the way most agreeable to him.

Yes, he certainly approved of his new pupil, but laid down such stringent laws about practising, declaring that with her talent Gwynneth should give at least three or four hours a day to her violin, that the girl felt quite frightened, and much relieved when she found herself once more with Margaret in the open air.

"Now," remarked the latter, "what shall we do? Lunch first, of course, and then how would you like me to leave you at the British Museum and call for you at four o'clock? That will give us nice time to catch our train."

Gwynneth replied she thought the arrangement excellent; so they made their way to a restaurant, and then Margaret left her, and went her way. Gwynneth knew she came up to town every Monday to help a friend, a clergyman's wife, with her large mothers' meeting and some district visiting, so made herself quite happy wandering from room to room of the great museum, and only wishing she had some competent person to explain much of what she saw. Presently a lady came round with a group of girls, and holding a small handbook in her hand she commenced talking to them, explaining many of the objects they saw.

"I want you girls specially to notice this cylinder," she remarked, as they stopped before a long round body. "There is a verse in Isaiah, **xx. 1**, which mentions a King of Assyria called Sargon, who went into battle. It is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture, and some of our so-called learned men said it was a mistake, there was no such man and no such battle. But some years ago this cylinder was discovered in excavating, and on it is the whole history of this very battle, thus proving how true the Scriptures are, whatever man may say to the contrary."

They passed on, but Gwynneth, who had heard every word, sat thinking, and her thoughts turned to her little Bible at home, a book she rarely opened except on Sundays or special occasions. Did all these wonderful old things round her really prove its truth? So absorbed was she that she never heard Margaret's footsteps, and started when she felt her hand on her shoulder.

"I hope you are not tired," said the latter. "I am later than I expected to be, but we can just catch our train."

So off they went, and were just in time to step into it and resume their homeward way.

"Margaret," said Gwynneth (they had quite dropped the conventional "Miss"), as she sat next her friend, "how I envied you being able

to chatter to that old professor in German. You must be very clever."

"Not a bit, dear," replied Margaret, laughing. "I have only used the ordinary talents God has given me. Don't you know any languages?"

"Only a little French. To tell the truth, I never liked my lessons! History and poetry I managed right enough; but grammar, geography, arithmetic, and French I simply hated. I'm sorry now."

"Well, it's never too late to mend. My sister Irene is a great linguist, and Ione Edgerton comes over to read French and German with her twice a week. Would you like to join them?"

"Oh, no, I'd only keep them back, and I should be ashamed for your sister to hear my pronunciation."

"But unless we face our difficulties, and own up to our faults, we'll never improve. I'm sure Irene will be delighted to help you, and, Gwynneth, you will find knowing languages such a help to you going through life. Make the most of every opportunity, dear; let it be said to you by and by, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' I'm always so glad it isn't 'Well done, clever servant.' So few of us would get a 'well done' if that were the case. But God sets such high value on faithfulness."

Gwynneth was silent, and looked out of the window. Then she slipped her hand through Margaret's arm.

"Margaret, I don't think I'm one of His servants at all."

The brown eyes raised to her friend were full of earnestness, and Margaret thanked God and continued.

"Don't you ? Can you give me a good reason why you should not be ?"

Gwynneth was silent again, then she said slowly :

"I'm not good enough. I've thought over things a good deal lately, specially since Auntie died, and I'm quite sure I'm not a real Christian. I've been baptized and confirmed, and I go to church and all that, but it doesn't make me a bit happy. There's something inside of me that wants more than that. Do you understand me ?"

"Yes, quite, because I was just the same once. An old writer called Saint Augustine once wrote : 'Thou hast made us for Thyself, and the heart is restless till it resteth in Thee.' Nothing can satisfy us but One."

"And that is ?"

"Christ." Margaret said the name softly, but her tone struck Gwynneth. She sighed.

"What ought I to do ?" she asked.

"Suppose you were cast into prison because

you owed a large sum of money, and you knew you would have to stay there, because you had nothing to pay. But suppose I heard of it, and went and paid your debt, and took you the order stating you were free. What would you do ? ”

“ I’d get out as quick as I could, and—and— I think I’d thank and love you for ever ! ”

Gwynneth’s eyes were shining as she turned them on her friend, and throwing her arm round her neck, she pulled down her face and kissed her.

“ Will you not do the same with Jesus Christ, dear ? ” went on Margaret. “ Repentance is turning away *from* sin, which we must do if we would be saved ; but faith is turning *to* Christ, and accepting Him and His finished work.”

But a shadow came over Gwynneth’s face.

“ But there’s something in the way, Margaret,” she said sadly, leaning her head against her friend’s shoulder. “ There’s some one I—I—almost hate. I suppose I can’t be a Christian and go on hating, can I ? ”

“ No, certainly not. You must be willing to part with all known sin, if you are to be one of Christ’s followers. But, Gwynneth, God can take all the hate out of you. Won’t you ask Him ? ”

A squeeze of the hand, and then the train drew up at Eddlewood Station, and the drive home was a very quiet one, Gwynneth turning over in her mind all her friend had said, and Margaret praying that this sweet, bright girl, so full of loveliness and talent might be led to the feet of Christ.



## CHAPTER XII

### CONFIDENCES

"Be truthful, be steadfast, whatever betide thee,  
Only one thing do thou ask of the Lord—  
Grace to go forward wherever He guide thee,  
Simply believing the truth of His word."

GWYNNETH'S birthday dawned bright and clear, with just a touch of frost in the air. On going down to breakfast she found a small parcel on her plate. It was a box of flowers from Matti, who had not forgotten the natal day of her bairn, and so sent her a few blossoms from the home garden. Gwynneth almost choked as she looked at them, and was glad her father had not come downstairs. Then she raised the faded blossoms to her lips and kissed them, while some bright drops fell from her eyes. Matti could neither read nor write, but evidently a neighbour had been called in to inscribe the short letter which accompanied the flowers :

"DEAR AND HONOURED MISS," it ran,

"This is to wish you a happy birthday and many of them. The flowers are out of the

garden, but they are mostly over now. Every one misses you, and the dokter keeps the house beautiful. He is a good man. Taffy is well and also the cat. The twins is doing well, and Nancy Jones have married Eli Morgan. They have gone to live at Amlwch.

"We hopes you are well. No more at present.

"From your humble servant,

"MATTI."

She was bending over this epistle when her father appeared on the scene.

"A letter, Gwynneth?" he exclaimed suspiciously.

"Yes, from dear old Matti, father. See, she has sent me some flowers from the garden at home. Wasn't it kind of her?"

His face clouded.

"I wish you would drop that senseless habit, child, of calling that rat-hole of a place home. This is your home. Don't let me hear you speak of Cemaes by that title again."

Gwynneth's lips quivered and her eyes flashed, but she shut her mouth tightly, and gathering up her treasures, put them safely away. Her father had become absorbed in his letters, so breakfast was a silent one, and it was with a very sore heart Gwynneth arranged her flowers afterwards in

her own sitting-room. Thick and fast her tears fell upon them, and Matti's epistle was read again and again.

Then she sat down and answered it, writing burning words of love and asking all about her old friends at Cemaes. She knew her father was going out for the day, so she set off in good time for General Edgerton's, and received a rapturous welcome from Ione, who carried her off to her own room to take off her coat and hat.

Such a pretty little nest it was, with its blue wall-paper, blue carpet, and white curtains with blue forget-me-nots scattered over them. Two bookcases filled with books took up two corners of the room, and a dainty writing-table stood in the window. Several pretty pictures covered the walls, but over the mantelpiece a large photograph of a young officer in full dress caught Gwynneth's eye, and she could not help going over to look at it.

"That's Douglas," explained Ione, who was busy gathering up sheets of manuscript at her writing-table. "He's my only brother, and that was done seven years ago, before he went to India."

Gwynneth's eyes travelled down from the bright handsome face of the young officer to a little scroll, beautifully painted, which hung just under it: "Bring him hither to Me."

"What have you got here?" she asked.

Ione's cheeks grew pink. She came over and stood by her friend.

"Margaret painted that for me," she said. "Don't you see the meaning? When I gave my heart to Jesus Christ, I did so want Douglas to be saved too, and I told Margaret all about it. She said God had put that desire into my heart, that the first desire of a truly converted soul is to win others to Jesus; and then she told me that by prayer we could always reach souls, and she painted that text for me. Wasn't it sweet of her? Whenever I see it I always send up a prayer for him."

The girl's eyes were very wistful as she gazed at the picture of her dearly-loved brother.

"It's lovely to think I shall see him tomorrow!" she exclaimed. "Just think of it, after seven years! Why, he won't know me—I was only eleven when he went away! Dear old Douglas!"

She gave a little dance round the room, and then taking Gwynneth's arm led her downstairs.

"Now this is your birthday, and you are to do just what you like. There is the gong for lunch, and we'll settle after if we'll go for a walk or drive, or just sit and talk and work. You are to choose, you know."

They had reached the dining-room, and Gwynneth could not help feeling quite at home as her bright little hostess kept up a ceaseless flow of lively chatter. Truly if Lady Farrant had seen her then her opinion of her quietness would have changed !

Lunch over they went into the drawing-room, and Gwynneth sank into an easy chair by the fire with a sigh of content. There was no stiffness here. Mrs. Edgerton's work-basket stood on a table near, her books scattered about the room. Fragrant flowers in pots and vases seemed to spring out of every corner, and an Irish terrier and a large grey Persian cat divided the hearth-rug between them.

"Oh, you dears !" exclaimed Gwynneth, lifting the cat into her lap (a proceeding much resented by it), and burying her face in its long fur. "How homely a room seems when there is a cat on the rug ! There's not much of a cat-and-dog life here seemingly !"

Ione laughed. "No, we don't know the meaning of it in this house," she said, and then added more soberly : "Father and mother have been married nearly forty years, and I've never once heard a hasty or unkind word pass between them."

"How lovely !" murmured Gwynneth, and wondered how many houses could testify to a like

fact. Then she remarked : " Forty years ! Then had you no other brothers or sisters ? "

" Yes, several ; but they all died in India. Douglas and I are the last of seven."

Gwynneth looked her sympathy.

" Now," said Ione, jumping up from the hearthrug where she had been playing with her dog, " we are not going to think about sad things. What shall we do ? Would you like a walk ? "

" Yes, very much."

" Then we'll go to Common Woods. It's about three miles off, and they're sure to be beautiful at this time of year, now the autumn tints are on. Perhaps we might even find some late blackberries."

It did not take them long to get ready, and the Irish terrier was wild with delight when his mistress appeared in her walking garb.

" Look at Curragh Bean ! " exclaimed Ione. " How well he knows what's in prospect. Do you like dogs ? We have two more, and if you don't mind we'll take all three."

On Gwynneth's assurance that she was very fond of animals, and dogs in particular, Ione gave a short whistle, and two dogs, a fine red setter and a liver-and-white spaniel with liquid eyes, came bustling round the corner of the house.

" The darlings ! " cried Ione, patting the

trio, who raced and jumped round her in mad delight. "Yes, you shall all come ; now be off !"

And the next minute the three were racing headlong down the avenue, followed by the two girls at a more sober pace.

What an afternoon it was ! The sun was shining gloriously out of a soft blue sky, across which here and there feathery clouds flitted or melted as they drew near the sun-rays. There was no wind, only that delicious softness in the air, with that peculiar odour one only gets on an autumn day when the leaves have begun to fall.

As they pursued their way fresh beauty met them at every turn. Now it was a bit of an old ruin over which kindly nature had flung her gentle robe of soft moss and ivy ; again it was a hedgerow where the bramble leaves had turned into glory-gleams of crimson and russet and gold, or else a bank covered with ferns or mosses of various kinds, over which Ione bent in rapture, filling her basket with all kinds of treasures as they went along.

"Don't you love Ruskin ?" she asked suddenly.

"Ruskin ? Who is he ?"

"Oh, don't you know ? He's a painter and a writer and altogether a great man. Margaret got me to read some of his books. I thought

them awfully dry at first, but now I just love them. I'll lend you my 'Fronde Agrestes,' if you like. There are lovely bits in it."

"What kind of bits?" asked Gwynneth, who, truth to tell, was not a great reader.

"Oh, about all sorts of things, but mostly about nature. The sky, and plants, and flowers. Ruskin makes you *see* things you'd otherwise pass by. At least, he has me. It was that bank of moss reminded me of him."

"How?"

"A sentence I read once: 'He who cannot make a bank sublime, will make a mountain ridiculous.'"

Gwynneth looked puzzled. "Explain it, Ione," she pleaded, laughing.

"Don't you see? Why, if you can't see beauty in the common little things in life, you never see anything in the greater things."

"Oh!"

Gwynneth had got something to think about now; but Ione continued:

"Then I love 'The Christian Year,' too. There's one of the poems which begins—

'Where is Thy favoured haunt, Eternal Voice.'

It's just splendid!"

"Can you say it?" asked Gwynneth.



They had stopped, and were leaning over a gate, looking across a field to the landscape beyond. Ione's eyes were glowing.

"Yes; would you like to hear it?"

And in a low musical voice Ione began to repeat Keble's exquisite lines for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity.

Gwynneth watched her with interest. She was somewhat of a problem to the Welsh maiden, this girl with so many sides to her character, and she began to feel somewhat of her enthusiasm as she proceeded, throwing her whole heart and soul into the repetition of the poem. By the time the last verse was reached Gwynneth too was absorbed.

"Raise thy repining eyes and take true measure  
Of thine eternal treasure;  
The Father of thy Lord can grudge thee naught,  
The world for thee was bought.  
And as this landscape broad, earth, sea, and sky,  
All centres in thine eye,  
So—all God does, if rightly understood,  
Shall work thy final good."

"It's beautiful!" exclaimed Gwynneth, as Ione ended, and then she added: "If only one could believe it."

"Believe it? Why not? What is there hard to believe?"

"That all God does is for our good."

"Why, that's the loveliest part of it," cried Ione. "I always like that verse best. It's only Romans VIII. 28 in poetry."

"What is that?"

"All things work together for good to them that love God," repeated Ione reverently.

Gwynneth was silent. Then she remarked: "You must read a good deal, Ione."

"Pretty well," replied the other, as they resumed their walk. "You see, I owe a lot to Margaret. 'Twas she got me to learn that poem, and when I left school she had a long talk to me one day, and advised me to join a reading society, saying it would help me to keep up regular reading. As we didn't know of one quite suitable at the time, she started one here, and ever so many of the girls round belong to it. She got Minnie, her sister, to be secretary, because she is so quiet and shy; she thought it would draw her out, and it has too. Every one pays one shilling a year, and we have to read one hour a day of some really sensible book (no story-books allowed); and we keep a list of what we read, which is sent in quarterly to the secretary, with our fines. For if we fail to read an hour daily, we have to pay a penny."

"And what becomes of the money?"

"Oh, it goes towards prizes. The subscrip-

tions and fines are added up at the end of the year, and the prizes (always books, which you may choose for yourself) come out of them. I've got two books since I joined two years ago, but I've had an awful lot of fines ! ”

They both laughed.

“ But,” continued Ione, “ I've learned such a lot, so I don't grudge the fines. Margaret is always telling us it isn't the prizes we are to work for, but the knowledge which will be of use to us all our lives. Our rule is, once you begin a book you must finish it ! That makes me careful what books I begin ! I generally consult Margaret.”

Gwynneth could not repress a smile.

“ What are you laughing at ? ” asked Ione.

“ Forgive me,” replied Gwynneth, “ but do you do anything without Margaret ? You seem to worship her ! ”

For a moment Ione looked vexed, then she smiled.

“ I can't help it,” she observed gently. “ You see, I owe more to her than any one else. It was Margaret led me to Jesus Christ, and I never, never can love her enough for doing that.” And the eyes that met Gwynneth's were full of love and admiration.

Gwynneth was silent. What could she say ? Instinctively she knew that between these two

there was a bond of which, so far, she knew nothing.

"And ever since then," went on Ione, "and it's four years ago, she has been like a dear, close sister. No one understands me like she does. I can always tell her things I could tell no one else. I can even tell her the bad, wicked things I have done, though I know just how she will look and speak to me, but she always helps me to get right again.

"That's where a true friend comes in," continued the girl musingly. "There are heaps of people in the world who will give you a bit of sympathy and love, but very few who really understand you. If I've done wrong, I'm never quite happy until I've told Margaret, and got her to pray with me. I hate seeing the grieved look in her face, but I'd rather she knew how bad I am. Once I got into dire disgrace at school, through saying something about one of the mistresses. I went to a day-school then in Eddlewood. Mother was in a fine way, and insisted I should apologize; but I wouldn't, so I was kept in my room, and every day mother came and lectured me for nearly an hour. But I got harder and harder, and just hated them all. But after I'd been kept in for four days, Margaret called. She'd been away from home, and only just returned, and Irene had told

her ; so off she came and asked if she might see me.

"At first mother said 'no,' but she pleaded ever so hard, and then poor, dear mother, who was at her wit's end what to do with me, gave in, and Margaret walked into my room. I shall never forget it. The instant I saw her the devil seemed to go out of me, and I just rushed into her arms. We were all alone, and she let me have it out. I hadn't cried a tear till she came ; but when I saw her I couldn't stop. She never scolded me ; she seemed to know I'd had as much of that as I could stand, but only held me fast and stroked my hair, saying, 'My poor child, my dear little sister !' Then when I got quiet, she said, 'Now we are going to pray.' And she got me on my knees, and—oh—I'll never forget how she prayed. I never speak of that, only I never felt such a sinner in my life, or saw how I had been grieving my Saviour. When we got up she put on my coat and hat, saying, 'Now I'm going to drive you down to school, that you may tell Miss Kenneday how sorry you are.' And she did, too. Mother never could understand how Margaret managed it, but *I* know. The fact is, she brings Jesus Christ into everything, and when she does *that*, of course you have to give in.

"Margaret's religion is one she *lives*, not just talks about."

They had reached the woods by this time, and Ione's expectation was not disappointed, for a few late blackberries still clung to the bramble twigs, though it was the glory-gleam leaves, as she called the tinted leaves, she picked mostly. Some nuts also rewarded their search, and a glorious sunset lit up most of their homeward walk.

Tired, but very happy, they sat down to their cosy tea in the drawing-room. Just as it was brought in, Ione looked up and gave a glad little cry. Margaret Elston stood before them.

"Ah! I knew you'd come if you could," cried Ione, jumping up and giving her a hug. "I didn't tell Gwynneth I'd asked you, not knowing if you were free this afternoon. There, sit down, and talk to us, we've just returned from a most glorious walk, haven't we, Gwynneth?"

Gwynneth nodded.

"A happy birthday, Gwynneth, dear," said Margaret, stooping and kissing her, and then she turned and laid a parcel on the table.

"What have you there?" asked Ione.

"Nothing for you, Miss Curiosity," laughed her friend. "Come, give me some tea, please, and mind your own business. It's not your birthday."

"Oh, then it's something for Gwynneth!"

exclaimed the girl delightedly. "I guessed as much, and—that reminds me——"

She dashed out of the room, and returned in a few minutes with a small volume bound in dark green leather in her hand, which she presented to Gwynneth.

"There, it's with my love. Fancy my forgetting to give it you before! I thought I'd find out first if you had it, and that's why I repeated that poem."

And Gwynneth, glancing at the title of her present, read, "The Christian Year."

Her face flushed with pleasure as she warmly thanked Ione.

Tea was a very merry meal, and then Margaret and she walked home together.

"I think," said Gwynneth, as she stood at her gate, bidding Margaret farewell, "this is one of the happiest birthdays I've ever had; at least," she added truthfully, "the part of it I spent with Ione."

The earlier events of the day still left a sore place in her heart.

"I'm so glad," responded her friend. "It is good you two being friends. Ione is a dear girl, and true as steel."

"How she loves *you*!" remarked Gwynneth.

"She is one of my children," said Margaret with a happy smile. "And, Gwynneth," and

she laid her hand caressingly on the girl's shoulder, "I want you, dear, to be another. I want you for my Master."

Gwynneth's eyes met Margaret's clear gaze. The latter had a way of looking through you.

Gwynneth was silent, only her eyes slowly filled with tears.

"This day may be the happiest in your life, if you will let God have His way with you, dear. Will you?"

But Gwynneth shook her head.

"There's something in the way, Margaret," she murmured; "only—only—do pray for me."

"Indeed I will, darling. And will you put this up in your room? Perhaps it may help you."

She placed her paper parcel in her hand, and after a kiss, turned away, while Gwynneth made her way homeward, and on reaching her room undid her present.

It was a beautiful photograph of "The Soul's Awakening," tastefully framed. Long and earnestly she gazed at it before hanging it on the wall of her sitting-room.

"Yes, Margaret is right," she said softly. "I hope it's a picture of me. Only, this girl looks quite awake, and as if she had found something—while I—I—am still in the dark."



## CHAPTER XIII

### DOUGLAS

"Not laid aside for ever,  
But only till thou rest,  
Until thou learn My tenderness,  
And feel My way is best.

"Wait ! for the head bowed lowly  
Shall yet be lifted higher ;  
Wait ! for I will baptize thee  
Anew with life and fire."

MRS. HENRY FAUSSETT.

"DOUGLAS, Douglas, tender and true," sang Ione, as she sprang out of bed the following morning. "Fancy seeing you to-day, you dear brother ! What will you be like ? Tall, and strong, and handsome as ever, I expect."

And she danced round the room in her joy.

How slowly the hours seemed to pass until she heard the carriage wheels on the gravel outside, which told her her parents and long-expected brother had arrived, and a strangely shy feeling stole over her as she went into the hall to welcome them.

First came her father, carrying the rugs,

who gave her a grave kiss, and then her mother, who drew her into her arms in a loving embrace, and then Ione's heart stood still!

Could this tall, thin man, with worn features, and walking with difficulty, leaning heavily on a stick, be her brother? The brother about whom she had talked and dreamed? This was a wreck, a broken-down specimen of manhood, whose pained features sent a pang through her heart.

A lump rose in the girl's throat, and it was with difficulty she restrained her tears as she went towards him, saying shyly:

"Oh, Douglas, welcome home! How glad I am to see you!"

His face lit up in a moment, as he halted, and drawing her towards him, gave her a warm embrace.

"Ione! Little sister!" he exclaimed. "No, surely I've made a mistake; five feet seven inches of you, if I mistake not! Ah, it's good to see you all."

And he slowly made his way towards the drawing-room, and sank into a chair.

Ione glanced at her parents, and then the whole truth broke upon her as she saw the drawn, stern look on her father's face, the look which she always knew betokened self-control when he was putting a tight rein upon his feelings.

But it was her mother's anxious expression of patient suffering that made it hard work for the girl to keep her self-control. To have all her hopes dashed to the ground in a moment ; yes, it required no little nerve to face it all.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Edgerton was busy hovering round her boy with loving little attentions. What matter that nearly twenty-eight years had passed since she bore him, and that he looked as if a good five years had been added to his days, was he not, would he not always be her boy still ?

Oh, mother-love ! art not thou the strongest force in God's creation ?

Ione slipped out of the room to hurry the tea, and then help her father off with his coat, and run any messages. Somehow she wanted a few minutes to recover herself. The vision of that white, drawn face seemed stamped upon her brain. But with the tea-tray she returned, and found her mother seated opposite to her brother, both evidently enjoying the cheery fire.

"It's fine to be home again," remarked Douglas, holding out his thin hands to the blaze. "All just as it used to be, eh, mater, all except Ione. Bless the child, how she has grown ! I feel quite proud to have such a sister !"

Ione coloured with pleasure, and began

busily to pour out the tea, placing tables at the elbows of both her mother and brother, and putting her father's chair ready for him as soon as he should appear.

It was not long before he joined the group, and then talk became general, and under the influence of tea and chat, the slight restraint which had brooded over them melted away.

Tea over, her parents both went away to unpack; but Douglas sat on, and then Ione came and knelt on the hearthrug beside him. All her old fear of the brother who used to tease and laugh at her so unmercifully was gone, and instead, her whole woman's nature went out in love and sympathy to the wrecked life before her.

She did not say anything, only placed her hand in his, and then their eyes met. His blue ones looked at her smilingly.

"You did not expect to see such a broken-down brother, did you, chick?"

It was the old name by which he used to call her. What memories it awakened!

"No," she responded softly; "and I'm so sorry to see you like—like—this, Douglas."

"Yes, and I blame myself for not having prepared you all for it. I'm afraid it's given the pater an awful shock. Fact is, I kept hoping and hoping I'd get all right. It's that wound I

got at Ladysmith has played the mischief—and I expected great things from the voyage home, and so did the doctors ; but we have both been disappointed. However, we must just chirp up and try to be as bright as we can for the parents' sake, and you will help me, won't you, Ione ? Don't pity me—I can't stand it yet—and perhaps—perhaps—now I'm home, things will look up. God grant they may," he added in a low voice.

Ione's eyes were full. She dared not look up, lest he should see her tears. Had he not asked her to help him ? Then she would be brave. Yes, things might not be so bad after all.

Then she slipped away to help her mother, whom she found busy changing her travelling garments.

When Mrs. Edgerton saw her daughter all her self-command gave way, and sinking into a chair, she uttered a long, low wail of anguish, and burst into tears. So Ione had to turn comforter, and kneeling beside her mother, she threw her arms round her, and mother and daughter mingled their tears together. Perhaps it was a strange way of comforting, but oftentimes the truest comfort comes to us, not by speech, but by the subtle sympathy of tears and silence.

"Poor, dear mother," murmured Ione at

length, when their grief had somewhat spent itself, "what a shock for you and father! But who knows what rest and home-nursing may do for him?"

Mrs. Edgerton sighed. "He looks dying, to me, Ione, my beautiful handsome boy. Perhaps I was too proud of him, and God is punishing me."

"Oh! no! no!" cried Ione. "Don't think of God like that, mother dear. He is our Father, and Douglas was one of His gifts to you and all of us. I often think how happy it must make God when He sees us taking pleasure in His gifts, just like when you or Dad give me something, and you see how happy it makes me."

Ione had never said so much to her mother before, but sorrow had unsealed her lips.

Mrs. Edgerton stroked the girl's hair fondly.

"You are a good child, Ione," she remarked with quivering lips. "I wish I had your faith, child; perhaps I may some day. Now let us hurry. Your father and Douglas will be wanting our help. To-morrow we will get in Dr. Verriker, and see what his opinion is about your brother."

And so the doctor came, although Douglas shook his head and said he had already been overhauled by some of the best army doctors.

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed the General. "Army doctors, indeed! They're just licensed to kill, that's what they are. No, we'll have further advice."

So Dr. Verriker came, and if his opinion was only a repetition of his predecessors', namely, that the wound, followed by enteric fever, was the cause of Douglas' breakdown, upon one thing he insisted, and that was that the young man must not spend the winter in England, but must, without delay, be taken to a warmer climate.

"Off with you!" he said in his off-hand, brisk way. "Cannes, Pau, Bordighiera, any of these will do; but out of England you must go, sir, and that within the next fortnight, or week would be better still, else the November fogs will be upon us, and I'll not answer for the consequences."

Blank consternation fell upon the little family; but the fiat had gone forth and must be obeyed; so before long Ione found herself in a whirlwind of sorting and packing and putting away all sorts of articles, choosing what was to be taken and what left.

A friend of the General's, who owned a small villa at Cannes, kindly placed it at his disposal, and Ione was torn between her longing to see life on the Continent, and leaving Margaret and

all her Eddlewood interests behind. She also regretted leaving Gwynneth, having so recently made her acquaintance. "But I'll write to them ever so often, and after all, haven't I always longed to travel, and learn French and Italian abroad?"

So engrossed was Ione with her preparations that she never noticed how studiously Margaret kept away from the house, whereas at other times she would have been the first to volunteer her services in packing and arranging things. Not so another, whose eager eyes often watched the door when visitors were announced, and whose quick ear listened hungrily for the one voice he longed to hear more than any other.

"After all, I'm a fool," observed Douglas to himself one day, after a ring at the bell had only proved the advent of a messenger to his mother. "Ten to one she has forgotten me, or taken up with some other fellow. And now I have really no right to think about her, crippled as I am, even if she would have me. Women don't want invalid husbands."

He sighed and fell into a fit of musing.

It was not until the day before their departure that Margaret, accompanied by Gwynneth, came to say farewell; and knowing how busy the travellers were, they considerately did not stay long. Douglas was resting in his own room, and



did not know Margaret had been until Ione mentioned it casually at the tea-table. He looked up quickly.

"Margaret Elston here, did you say? Ah, I should like to have seen her."

"Would you? I'm sorry I did not know."

But his slightest wish was enough for Ione, who sent off a little note to her friend, asking her to see them off at the station, if possible, the following morning.

The start was an early one, but, nevertheless, Margaret was there, and Douglas' worn face lit up as he saw her standing on the platform, ready to welcome them.

"Miss Elston!" he exclaimed, "this is a surprise. I was saying only yesterday how sorry I was not to have seen you when you called yesterday, but had no idea we should meet to-day."

Margaret smiled. She was busy helping him out of the carriage, while Ione looked after her mother, the General having gone to take the tickets and see to the luggage.

How her heart beat she only knew, and it required all her self-command to appear bright when all the while something was tugging at her heart-strings and a lump coming in her throat.

"I hope your trip abroad will set you up,

Captain Edgerton," she remarked in as steady a voice as she could command. "I believe the air of Cannes is wonderful."

"Yes, I am hoping for great things. What would we be without hope?" he added, and glanced at the sweet face he remembered so well.

Margaret coloured. They were slowly making their way along the platform towards the waiting-room.

"Where would we be without God?" she said softly.

"You are right. I found that out on the veldt. When you are surrounded by dead and dying, it makes a man think. I found you were right after all, Margaret."

A thrill went through the girl, and a glad light sprang into her eyes. Had her prayers, then, been answered? There was no time for more, for the General came bustling down to meet them, and presently they were joined by Mrs. Edgerton and Ione, and then the train came in, and in a few minutes they were off, and Margaret walked slowly homewards with a lighter step and a song in her heart, other than she had known when she set out.

Four days later came a letter from Ione, telling of their safe arrival, and how well Douglas had borne the journey. They had broken it

one night at Paris, and the next at St. Etienne. "And we think he looks better already," wrote Ione; "his spirits were wonderful all through the journey, and father and mother are quite cheered."

So was Margaret, who, looking up, "thanked God and took courage."

Gwynneth found plenty to do as the days passed by. Notwithstanding her father's words, she felt more drawn to the Elstons than to any one she had met, even when through Lady Farrant she began to make other acquaintances. That good woman would have had the girl constantly at her house; but Gwynneth declined all her invitations whenever it was possible, but went more and more to Pine Grove. Before many weeks had passed she found herself a member of the Reading Society to which Ione had referred, was taking lessons in French and German twice a week with Irene Elston, and practising with Margaret whenever that person could give her a spare half-hour, as well as her four hours' practice at home. Her music lessons were increasing delights, and she was becoming fast friends with her German teacher.

One day towards the end of November she was busy practising, her father having left that morning, saying he was going away on business for the week-end. So engrossed was Gwyn-



Gwynneth gazed at him in astonishment, and the look on his face was no less puzzled (page 213)



neth with her violin that she never heard the drawing-room door open, and almost dropped her instrument when, in turning round, she saw a slight, dark young man of about seventeen years of age watching her.

She gazed at him in astonishment, and the look on his face was no less puzzled.

Advancing towards him, she said :

"Excuse me, but—may I ask your name and what brings you here ?"

He gave a low laugh that somehow grated on her ear.

"Exactly what I was going to ask you," he replied ; "but ladies first, I suppose, so I may tell you my name is Walter Davenant, and I have come home for the week-end. Now, who are you ?"

The air of pride with which he gave his name, and the almost rude tone in which he asked for hers, caused Gwynneth's colour to rise, as drawing herself up she observed quietly :

"My name is Gwynneth Davenant, and I am your sister by your father's first marriage."

Her companion's face grew scarlet.

"The dickens you are !" he exclaimed. "A likely story that. My father never had a previous marriage. What on earth are you talking about ?"

Gwynneth quietly placed her violin in its

case and closed the piano. Then she turned and faced her brother, who had been watching all her movements. His face was very pale, and there was an expression there she did not like. Nevertheless, she determined there should be no quarrel between them if she could help it, so, holding out her hand, she said :

" I am sorry if you don't believe me, Walter, but when you see our father he can explain everything. Meanwhile, let us make friends. I am sorry he is away. Why did you not let him know you were coming ? "

" I did ! " exclaimed the youth, ignoring her outstretched hand. " I sent a wire this morning saying I had got the week-end off, and to send the dogcart to the station. Of course, it wasn't there, and there being no flies in this outlandish place, I've had to walk. They're sending down my bag. What time's dinner ? "

" As father is away I always dine early, and have had mine ; but as you have come, of course, we can make other arrangements. I will see Mrs. Richardson about it. "

And, well pleased to part company with her newly found brother, Gwynneth went her way, leaving Walter to go to his room and recover his temper. It was well she did not see him after she left. Her quiet manner and words somehow convinced the young man that she was telling

him the truth. If she were not what she said, how came she here, and how dared she act the part of mistress as she had done? His brow darkened as, with his hands deep in his pockets, he strode up and down the drawing-room, letting fall words, freely sprinkled with oaths, which it was well Gwynneth did not hear. His deep-set grey eyes, overshadowed by heavy dark eyebrows, had an angry gleam in them, and there was anything but a good expression in the curves of his thick sensuous lips.

Poor Gwynneth, with a heart bursting with indignation, was meanwhile searching for the housekeeper, whom she found in her own little sitting-room.

"Mrs. Richardson," she exclaimed as she entered, "I am very sorry to disturb you, but my brother has come, and so I fear we must make other arrangements about dinner, as he evidently expects it."

"Your brother come! Master Walter?" and the good woman laid down the book she had been reading and rose to greet her young mistress. "Well, to be sure, and he never telling us to expect him, and the master away!" Then, on seeing Gwynneth's troubled face, she added: "There, there, Miss Gwynneth, my dear, don't you worry yourself. I'll send Nancy up to prepare his room, and dinner shall be at



the usual hour, unless, of course, you'd like it earlier."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Richardson. Perhaps we might have it at six o'clock, instead of seven, if cook can manage it."

And Mrs. Richardson assuring her it should be as she wished, Gwynneth departed, while the good woman murmured to herself:

"I wonder how those two met? There's a look in my young lady's face I don't like to see. Can Master Walter have been rude to her? He hasn't much manners, but I doubt if the master will stand his taking a high hand with his sister."

Gwynneth could hardly believe her eyes when, an hour and a half later, her brother joined her in the drawing-room in immaculate evening dress.

He seemed also to have put on new manners, and treated her with a marked respect, bordering on the ridiculous, so exaggerated were both his words and manners, and she found it hard work to keep her countenance when, upon the gong sounding, he made her a low bow and presented his arm, to take her in to dinner. She took it, however, and the pair made their way to the dining-room, where, having handed her to her seat, he took his father's place at the head of the table, and the meal began. More than

once Gwynneth found herself wondering if this could be the same youth who two hours previously had insulted her in the drawing-room. His endless stories, his knowledge of the world, and of every topic that was started, was a constant surprise, and when, on returning to the drawing-room, he sat down to the piano and commenced to play, and sonatas, fugues, and nocturnes glided from under his fingers, she felt he was a problem she could not solve, but lay back in her chair and gave herself up to enjoyment.

“After all,” she thought, “I must have made a mistake. He cannot be what I thought when first we met. A boy who can talk and play as he does must indeed be clever. No wonder father is proud of him. Well, perhaps I shall be, too, some day.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### "WHY AM I HERE?"

"Life is so complicated a game, that the devices of skill are liable to be defeated at every turn by air-blown chances, incalculable as the descent of the thistle-down."

GEORGE ELIOT.

GWYNNETH saw little of Walter during his stay.

The following day he gave up to visiting his friends, bidding her not wait dinner for him if he did not return in time, and she found afterwards that he had dined and spent the evening at Sir James Farrant's.

On Sunday morning when she enquired if he would accompany her to church, he burst into a loud laugh.

"My dear sister!" he exclaimed, in the patronizing way he had chosen to adopt, "you don't know what you ask. Why, I haven't darkened the doors of the church here for years."

Gwynneth looked what she felt, shocked and grieved.

"But, Walter——" she began.

He waved his hand grandly. "There, there,

you needn't waste your breath on me. None of the upper set about here troubles the parson much. I'm sure you've found out my father never goes, does he?"

And seeing the grieved look on her face, he walked away whistling, while Gwynneth went alone to her place of worship.

It was on this Sunday, when walking home from church, that she was joined by a nice young girl, Rose Wood, who with her brother was also on her homeward way.

The girls had met once before at the Elstons', and something in Gwynneth's face made Rose slacken her pace and join her in her homeward walk. The sad expression in the countenance of the former was not lost on Rose.

"Isn't it a lovely day, Miss Davenant?" she began. "And what a helpful message the Vicar gave us to-day. Do you like our service here?"

"Yes, very much," responded Gwynneth. "It is all so new to me to be in a big church, with a surpliced choir. Our church at home was so very tiny, and our Vicar an old man."

"Then you must feel the difference. We all like Mr. Gordon, he is so genial and bright. It's a pity his wife is so delicate. But she manages to do a good deal notwithstanding, and of course the Elstons help her. Mr. Gordon often calls Margaret Elston his curate!"

Gwynneth smiled ; was this another devotee of Margaret's ?

"I suppose you know Margaret has a Bible-class for women and girls on Sunday afternoons ?" continued Rose. "It's such a nice one. I used to go until the Vicar ferreted me out, and induced me to become a Sunday-school teacher. If you felt inclined to go, I'm sure you'd get a welcome. It's at three o'clock, in the old billiard-room."

"Thank you," said Gwynneth absently ; "I'll think about it."

And having reached her gate, the friends shook hands and separated. Gwynneth felt unusually lonely that day. She had only seen Walter at breakfast, and he had left a message saying he would be out all day. After lunch she took a book and retired to her own room, but she could not settle, and having changed her book three times, and rearranged the ornaments on her chimney-piece, finally decided to go for a walk, when suddenly she remembered Rose Wood's words, and a sudden determination seized her to go and see for herself what this Bible-class was like.

She glanced at the clock. It pointed to ten minutes to three, so hastily putting on her things, she stepped out of the house, and, crossing the road, soon found herself at the Elstons' hall door.

Just then she saw two of her own servants walking up the avenue, and feeling sure they were also bound on the same errand as herself, she waited for them, and was greeted by a bright smile from both the maids.

"Are you coming to Miss Margaret's class, miss?" enquired Nancy, and on Gwynneth answering in the affirmative, she continued:

"Oh, then, this is the way. We don't go through the house, but round it, by this little pathway," and the girl pointed to a narrow path running round the house.

"Go first, Nancy; I'll follow," said Gwynneth. So Nancy and her companion obeyed, and Gwynneth followed, and soon came in sight of a wooden building, covered with creepers, through the windows of which she could see quite a crowd of heads.

She followed the girls in, but when they made their way up the room, she slipped into a seat at the back, and soon became keenly interested in her surroundings.

The room was a large, comfortable, bright one, four windows running down each side. It was almost full of chairs, nearly all of which were filled, and Gwynneth was not far out of her count when she guessed that nearly a hundred young women and girls were present.

At the other end of the room was a small

platform on which stood a chair and a small table, covered with a dark green cloth. By the side of the platform stood an American organ, and seated at it was Margaret Elston, preparing to play the hymn she had just given out.

On the walls of the building were various texts and water-colour paintings, while some of the texts were painted in long scrolls, which added considerably to the bright effect of the whole.

Gwynneth was studying these texts when she was roused by the first notes of the organ, and a girl handing her a hymn-book with a smile. She took it, and then stood and joined in the singing, her musical soul much enjoying the hearty way in which every one seemed to take part in it. Then followed a prayer, and Gwynneth for the first time heard some one pray "without a book." To her it was a revelation.

Then came another hymn, and then Margaret mounted the little platform, and looking round her with a bright smile, gave out her subject from the Book of Esther.

Evidently they had all been studying the book together, and were now in the middle of it, for it was the fourth chapter.

"I think," began Margaret, in her full, clear voice, "that we should call our lesson to-day 'The Responsibility of being who and where we are.' Some of us seem to imagine we just became

ourselves by chance, and fell into our present surroundings by accident. But it is not so. God has a place for every one in this room, nay, more, for every one in the world. This may surprise some of you; but it is true, nevertheless, and our part is to find out and fit into God's plan for us. Esther little thought in her childhood that she would ever occupy Vashti's place; Moses little knew he would be the one to lead a nation out of Egypt; or Gideon that he should deliver Israel from their enemies. None of these people were born in high positions; but God had need of them, and I want each of you to say to yourself, 'God needs *me*.' Will you?

"We have seen how Esther became queen; but now a national trouble had unexpectedly arisen, and her uncle sends to remind her that God had a purpose in placing her on a throne, and that if she shirks the responsibility of her position and influence, she will not escape punishment (see verse 13). God will still look after His people (verse 14); but she will miss the privilege of being a fellow-worker with God, and then he adds: 'And who knoweth but thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'

"Did you ever think that God brings us to certain places in our lives to meet special emergencies and to help certain people?



‘He has placed me where I am,  
Just His messenger to be,  
Just to seek some straying lamb,  
Working for Eternity.’

“*Working for Eternity!* What a grand thought! How it would hallow all we do, did we but realize it more, that everything we do leaves its mark on eternity.”

Gwynneth started. These were new ideas to her, and set her off on a long train of thought, so that she heard little more of the lesson, and for the rest of the evening she found herself going over and over again the old ground—“Why has God sent me to Eddlewood? What am I doing for Him here that will leave its mark on eternity?”

By the next evening Walter had departed, and her father returned on Tuesday. He did not seem too well pleased to find that his son had been and gone during his absence.

“I am sorry you did not tell him, father, that I was here,” remarked Gwynneth. “He would not believe me at first when I told him who I was, and it was very awkward for me.”

Mr. Davenant laughed. “The young puppy! So he would not believe you, eh? I hope he altered his opinion before he left.”

“Oh, yes,” replied Gwynneth, but said no more. Her father’s laugh and free-and-easy way

of dealing with things grated upon her, and she dreaded the meeting with Hugh, wondering if he likewise would meet her as a stranger, and treat her the same as his brother had done. But she need not have feared.

One day, a few days before Christmas, her father informed her that her youngest brother would arrive in the afternoon, and as he would be out, he hoped she would entertain him. This she promised to do, and awaited with a beating heart the arrival of the dogcart which had gone to the station to bring him home. It was snowing hard, and as she stood at the window watching the softly falling flakes, she spied the dogcart making its way up the avenue, and presently a boyish voice rang out in the hall, where evidently the butler was divesting his young master of his snowy coat, and the next instant the door opened and Hugh appeared.

Like Walter, he stopped short at seeing her; but it was a very different face that greeted hers. Such a bright open countenance, with big blue eyes, and fair, curly hair, and he stepped forward with outstretched hand.

"I don't know who you are," he said; "one of Dad's visitors, I suppose. How do you do?"

Gwynneth smiled as she took his hand.

"You have not heard that you have a sister, then?" she asked.

"A sister! What do you mean? There's only Walter and me. We never had one."

"Father had a wife before he married your mother, dear Hugh. She died when I was born, and I have lived all my life with my old aunt in Wales. She died last October, and that is why I am here. Will you love me, Hugh?"

She asked the question without knowing it. It seemed forced from her, as her heart went out to this bright-faced little lad.

"Well, I never!" he remarked slowly. "This is a jolly surprise for a fellow. But I'm awfully glad. Yes, yes, I—think I'll—love you, because—you are just a little bit—like—mother."

He stepped forward, but the next minute Gwynneth had her arms round his neck and had given him a warm kiss.

He did not resent it. "That's the first kiss I've had since mother died," he said in a low voice, brushing his hand across his eyes; "and, I say, it's awfully jolly to have a sister. Have you been here long? And, by the way, what's your name?"

"My name is Gwynneth; it's Welsh, and I've been here nearly three months."

"Gwynneth! What a rummy name; but I like it, it's so uncommon. It's rather long, though. Don't you think Gwen would be nice for short? Shall I call you that?"

"You shall call me anything you like. Now, wouldn't you like a cup of tea? Father is out, so I ordered it up in my room. I thought it would be more cozy. Will you come up?"

"Yes, thanks; only just let me go and see old Richie—she's a chum of mine."

And off he went in search of the housekeeper, and did not turn up until ten minutes later.

A shadow fell on his face as he opened the door of Gwynneth's sitting-room, but it was gone in a moment.

"This was mother's room," he remarked in a low voice. "I haven't been in it for two years. I'm glad you've got it; it seemed such a shame to let it be shut up; it's the nicest room in the house."

"Do you think so? Then I hope you'll come here whenever you like. Do you know father has given it to me for my very own, and all the furniture in both this and the bedroom? Isn't it kind of him?"

Hugh nodded, and then set to work at his tea, his long journey having evidently given him an appetite.

How he talked, and what stories he had to tell! Soon Gwynneth felt as if they were quite old friends. Then bedtime came, and they parted for the night.

Walter arrived on Christmas Eve, just as she

and Hugh were busy decorating the big hall with evergreens. He shook hands with them both, taking scant notice of his younger brother, and then went in search of his father.

Gwynneth had been sorely exercised over her Christmas gifts. She was not used to choosing gifts for gentlemen, and could not bear the idea of having nothing to give her father and brothers, so in desperation she went to consult the good housekeeper.

"Bless you, Miss Gwynneth, dear, the master and the young gentlemen have everything they need. But if you *will* give them something, what would you say to a nice paper-knife for your father?—I remember he broke his not long ago. And what about a cigar-case for Master Walter?"

But Gwynneth recoiled in horror.

"No, no, Mrs. Richardson, that would not do. I don't believe in lads smoking, and certainly won't encourage it in either of my brothers."

Mrs. Richardson laughed. "Well, well, my dear, never mind; it's clear, though, they'll do it in spite of all you may say to the contrary. Now an inkstand might suit Master Walter, and a knife for Master Hugh."

"Yes, that sounds better. Thank you, I'll do as you say"

And Gwynneth had gone off to make her purchases.

It was the day before Walter's return, and she and Hugh had spent it together in London. What fun they had, and how they enjoyed themselves, and what piles of parcels they brought home that evening, for Gwynneth had chosen a gift for every one in the house, and several for old friends at Cemaes.

"It's ripping!" exclaimed Hugh, as he and Gwynneth spent the following morning in her den, as he called it, wrapping up and addressing the various articles. "It reminds me of when mother was alive. We've never had a decent Christmas since. She always made it so jolly, and I'm precious glad we're to be at home and not dining out. I do hate having to go out and do manners."

Gwynneth laughed and quite agreed with him.

On Christmas morning a glad surprise awaited her. Beside her plate at breakfast lay a parcel, upon which she recognized Margaret's handwriting, so she put it aside to open when she was alone, and turned to another parcel, which she rightly guessed came from Hugh. It was a beautifully fitted-up paint box, water-colours, with brushes and all complete.

"Oh, Hugh, how lovely!" she exclaimed. "How did you know I wanted one?"

He was beaming all over, highly delighted at the pleasure his gift afforded.

"Oh, I heard you say you wanted to take painting lessons in the spring, and I saw you'd only that old thing upstairs, and considered it my duty to encourage art. But, I say, this is a ripping knife! You're a brick to think of it, Gwen; it's just what I wanted, for Forbes bagged mine and never returned it."

They were alone in the dining-room, but their father now entered, and, wishing them both a happy Christmas, put an envelope into each of their hands. Gwynneth's contained a ten-pound note, and Hugh's a five-pound one. He seemed pleased at their grateful thanks, and evidently touched at Gwynneth's remembrance of him, remarking that the paper-knife would be most useful, and he would use it daily.

Breakfast was nearly over before Walter put in an appearance. He received the Christmas greetings of his brother and sister with a nod and "Same to you," thanked Gwynneth for her present, acknowledged his father's gift with a "Much obliged, sir," as he slipped his envelope into his pocket, and then commenced his breakfast with a preoccupied air.

How sweet it was to Gwynneth to have a companion as she wended her way to church that Christmas morning: Hugh, with his bright face

and Eton clothes, looked such a little gentleman, and it is hard to say which felt more proud of the other!

It was not until her return from service that she suddenly remembered Margaret's parcel, and ran up to her "den" to examine it. Inside she found another parcel and a note from Margaret, saying Ione had sent her a little gift in a parcel she was sending her friend, so Margaret sent it across with hers. Ione's was a beautiful photograph of Raphael's "Transfiguration," framed, and from Margaret a book—"The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life"—and inside she had written :

GWYNNETH DAVENANT,

*With the loving Christmas wishes of her friend Margaret Elston, who prays that the "Christian's Secret" may become her heritage.*

Gwynneth was very pleased, and she put away her treasures and then ran downstairs at the summons of the luncheon gong.

Dinner that evening was rather more lively than usual, and after it was over they all retired to the drawing-room, where Walter seated himself at the piano and for some time played and sang.

"By the way, Gwynneth, I should like to hear



you play your violin," suddenly remarked her father, and Walter somewhat unwillingly got up from his seat.

Gwynneth flushed. "If Walter will kindly play for me, I will do my best, father," she replied, and her brother, well pleased, again seated himself at the piano, while Gwynneth tuned her instrument.

Mr. Davenant had had a short talk with Margaret Elston about his daughter's musical talent, but he was not prepared for the treat in store for him. He had a good ear, and was quick to recognize talent when thrown in his way, so his delight and pride were genuine, and he loudly applauded her performance.

Of course Gwynneth was pleased, and so melody after melody poured from the strings of her violin, and her father and brothers were loud in their praise.

"You are due to dine at Lady Farrant's to-morrow evening," exclaimed her father, "and I should like you to take your violin. Lady Alice is always glad to get musical performers, and knows good playing."

Poor Gwynneth! It was the first cloud that had overshadowed her that day. She neither liked Lady Farrant nor her dinner-parties, but felt she could not refuse her father, specially as he was giving her the benefit of such good

violin lessons. But she heartily wished Boxing Day was over as she retired to bed that night, and endorsed Hugh's wish that Lady Farrant and her dinner-parties were at Jericho! Poor boy! it meant a lonely evening for him, but he consoled himself by declaring he would spend it with Mrs. Richardson, whom Gwynneth knew well would spoil him to his heart's content.

"I say, Richie," remarked the boy the following evening, as he lay full length on the housekeeper's hearthrug, watching the chestnuts he was busily roasting in the fire, "one of the greatest bits of luck that has befallen us is Gwen turning up here. She's a regular brick, and I only wish she had come long ago. Don't you think it was awfully funny father never telling us before that we had a sister?"

The housekeeper was too wise to discuss family matters with a boy of thirteen, so discreetly remarked: "No doubt the master had good reasons for keeping his secret, Master Hugh; but, as you say, your sister is a dear young lady, and I too am heartily glad she has come to live here."

"It's next best to having mother," went on Hugh dreamily, "and I like to see her in mother's room. She says I can go there whenever I like, and that's jolly, because one never knows when Walter will turn up, and he can be such a bear."

Mrs. Richardson remained silent. Walter was no favourite amongst his father's domestics.

"Well, I shan't mind going back to school so much next term," continued the boy, "because Gwen has promised to write to me every week. Isn't that stunning, Richie? I shan't feel so sad when I see the other fellows receiving letters, when there's one for me. It's been so beastly, never getting a letter from any one the whole term; no one ever wrote since mother died. And Gwen's going to look after my rabbits and white mice. She's not a bit afraid of them. Yes, she's a regular brick."

And the good housekeeper smiled again, and wondered if her young mistress "had come to the kingdom for such a time as this"!

## CHAPTER XV

### A NIGHT OF MISERY

“All society,  
Howe’er unequal, monstrous, crazed and cursed,  
Is but the expression of men’s single lives—  
The loud sum of the Silent Units!”

E. B. BROWNING.

**P**OOOR Gwynneth !

Her father had no sooner entered the drawing-room when dinner was over than she heard him tell Lady Farrant that his daughter had brought her violin, and would be delighted to play for them, should her services be of any use.

So before long she was sought out in the cosy nook where she had hidden herself, and found herself placed in the centre of a large company of people, one of whom volunteered to accompany her. She looked round for Walter, but could see him nowhere, and, oh, how she longed for Margaret !

But the ordeal had to be gone through, and Gwynneth bravely faced it.

How few realize the positive agony many a

young girl has gone through when asked to sing or play before a large roomful of people!

Fortunately Gwynneth had more courage than Ione; besides, she was more master of her instrument, and once started she soon forgot herself and her surroundings in her melodies, and was not prepared for the burst of applause which greeted her when she finished.

Again and again she was asked to play, and Lady Farrant ended by declaring she *must*, positively *must* come to her gathering on Twelfth Night, that such talent as hers must not be left idle.

Gwynneth's heart sank. The empty talk around her, the ceaseless gossip, and light banter, all grated on her ears, as well as the fulsome compliments which she heard flung from one to the other. However, her father answered for her, promising she and Walter should both accept Lady Farrant's invitation, and only regretting that another engagement prevented his accepting it also. And so it came to pass that on January the sixth Walter and his sister were once more guests of her ladyship and Sir James.

Walter was in high spirits, and Gwynneth wondered at the cause.

The Twelfth Night gathering was far larger than the one on Boxing Day, and it happened to be on a Saturday night, so Gwynneth ordered

the carriage to return for her and Walter at 11.30, stoutly refusing to listen to the grumbles of the latter "that it was a beastly shame to return so early."

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Walter," remarked Gwynneth; "but I am not going to remain at any party on Sunday morning. Besides, it is not fair to the servants."

"Stuff and nonsense!" retorted her brother angrily. "I tell you what it is, Gwynneth, you are growing into a regular Puritan. It's all those Elston girls; they are regular fanatics. Well, you needn't expect me to return with you at 11.30. I shall walk home with one or other of the fellows, so don't wait for me."

And so saying they entered the house, and for the rest of the evening Gwynneth saw little of him. She played several times, and then began slowly walking from one room to another, surprised at seeing how many people were gathered together. Suddenly she stopped, and a look of surprise and horror overspread her face. She had come to a beautifully fitted-up conservatory, and found it occupied by various groups of people all busily playing cards, and in the far distance she felt sure, yes, quite sure, she saw her brother.

"What are they doing?" she asked a stout old lady who sat fanning herself near the door.

"Playing bridge, my dear. Won't you go and join them?"

"Oh, no, no," exclaimed Gwynneth. "I never play cards."

Her companion laughed, and putting up her eyeglasses looked her up and down. "How extraordinary!" she remarked. "Why, where have you come from, child? Every one plays cards nowadays."

"I had an aunt who brought me up, and never let me touch a card," replied Gwynneth; "she always said they were a dangerous amusement."

"Ah! well, perhaps she was right. I heartily wish more people believed it, and that Julia had never started."

The old lady sighed, and Gwynneth determined to make one effort to reach Walter. She quietly made her way to his side and waited until his game was ended. So engrossed was he that he never saw her, and started as she laid her hand on his arm.

"Walter, I'm going home; won't you come with me?"

His face was flushed, and she could see he had been drinking.

"No!" he exclaimed with an oath, as he pocketed a handful of gold, and then turned and began to make preparations for another game.

Gwynneth sighed and turned away, and before

long stood in the hall, violin case in hand, awaiting the arrival of her carriage. Her heart was sick and sore. Was she right in leaving her young brother in such a place of temptation? And yet, what could she do? He would not listen to her, and might remain there for many hours later, for all she knew.

Suddenly a soft voice at her elbow made her turn round. A girl, beautifully dressed, but with large, weary-looking eyes, stood beside her.

"Excuse my taking the liberty of speaking to you, but you are Miss Davenant, are you not? I think it was you who played the violin?"

"Yes," replied Gwynneth.

"I have a favour to ask. I am Eva Stenton, and I came with the Trevors, but they are not leaving for another two hours, and my mother is not well, so I am anxious to get home early. You pass our gate, could you give me a seat in your carriage?"

"With pleasure," responded Gwynneth, and so the two drove off together. Gwynneth lay back as they rolled along, weary and sick at heart; but sat up when her companion suddenly asked:

"Miss Davenant, do you believe in a God?"

"Of course," exclaimed Gwynneth, amazed at the question. "Don't you?"

"No. If there's a God, He doesn't seem to



care much about women and girls. Do you know I've lost £100 at bridge to-night, and haven't a farthing to pay it with."

Gwynneth was speechless with surprise and horror. "But God is not to blame for that," she answered.

"Perhaps not, only that I prayed I might win. I've often been very lucky, only now I owe a lot of money, and there'll be no end of a row if I don't pay up. I kept my 'lucky pig' in my pocket all the evening, and wore my amber cross and prayed on it. But it hasn't done me any good."

Was this girl a heathen? "You prayed to God through an amber cross and a 'lucky pig'?" gasped Gwynneth. "Where did you learn such heathenish customs?"

The girl laughed bitterly.

"Oh, I've heard mother talk like that; I believe she's done the same herself. She's not a bad sort, and feels it terribly that she can't get her spirits now through the tradespeople. Dad stopped that. But I get her chloral and eau-de-Cologne to drink when I can, it picks her up."

Gwynneth felt she was sinking deeper and deeper into the mire.

"Will your father help you to pay this money?" she asked.

"Dad? No fear; we're always having rows

about money, and his paying mother's and my dressmakers' bills."

"Is he so badly off, then?"

"Yes, we're awfully hard up. Dad has only four thousand a year, and mother three hundred. I make my own pocket-money, either at bridge or however I can. Generally off my presents."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I either sell or pawn what's given me. I can easily get out what I want just for the night by paying a deposit. But here we are at our door. Good night, and I'm awfully obliged for the lift."

She turned and took Gwynneth's hand.

"I wish you were one of the religious sort," she added; "you might have helped me."

A stab went through Gwynneth's heart. "God can help you, Miss Stenton," she said. "I have often prayed to Him and been helped. Won't you promise me to do so?"

"Oh, I'll think about it," responded the other lightly, as she stepped out of the carriage. "Good night."

And then the door was shut and Gwynneth drove home alone. Alone, and with her mind in a whirl. Had she been dreaming, had some horrible nightmare, from which she would awaken and thank God "it was only a dream"?

She dragged herself wearily upstairs, and found

a bright fire in her own little sitting-room and hot coffee awaiting her. She never let her maid sit up.

She threw off her cloak and sank into an easy chair, closing her eyes as if to shut out her thoughts. All the events of the evening passed before her—the crowded drawing-room, the sumptuous supper-tables, loaded with every kind of luxury, groaning under the weight of the costliest wines, meats, and fruits, peaches piled high on silver dishes. “They cost half a crown each,” she had heard one lady remark to another, and strawberries, too. How the people had grabbed at them, almost fought for them! What such a feast must have cost!

Then her thoughts wandered off to the bridge-room. Once again she saw her brother’s flushed face, and the look of triumph in his eyes as he gathered up his handful of gold. She buried her face in her hands with a groan. Why did the text she had heard at her first Bible-class so suddenly flash into her mind now—“Who knoweth if thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

Had she? Had God really sent her to her father’s house to help save her brothers? Was this her kingdom? But she was not one of the “religious sort,” even Eva Stenton had detected that. What was she, then?

She slipped down on her knees and knelt beside her chair. She tried to pray, but the words died on her lips, only a stifled cry went up from her heart, "Oh! God, help me to know Thee, and bring me to Thyself."

Did she but know it, it was the first real prayer she had ever uttered. How long she knelt she never knew; but by and by the storm in her breast grew calmer, tears came to her relief, and a great yearning grew in her heart to help and save those whom she saw were going headlong to ruin.

Walter first, her brother, how could she reach him? And then that poor girl—oh, what a home she must have!

"But I want help myself," wailed Gwynneth. "How can I help them unless I know the way myself?"

She reached down her little Bible, and opened it, but no light came; and so at length she arose, undressed, and went to bed, just as the clock was sounding three. Was that Walter's step she heard, just as she was falling asleep? But it sounded very unsteady.

It was a very tired, heavy-eyed sister who greeted Hugh the following morning at the breakfast-table, at which Walter did not appear. Mr. Davenant was away from home.

"Well, Gwen, how did you enjoy yourself

last night ? ” asked Hugh. “ You look awfully tired.”

“ I didn’t enjoy myself at all,” replied Gwynneth wearily ; “ and I’m so tired and have such a headache I don’t think I can go to church with you,” she added.

Hugh looked disappointed.

“ Can’t you ? I’m awfully sorry, but I don’t want you to come if you’re bad.”

“ I’ll lie down ; perhaps a sleep will do me good.”

And so after breakfast she retired to her room, and Hugh went off to church with Mrs. Richardson, who was well pleased to have her little master once more at her side.

“ I say, Richie,” he remarked, “ I think parties like they had last night are all rot. There’s Walter as cross as a bear. I met him coming downstairs just as I came out, and he’d hardly speak to me, because I told him 10.30 was a nice hour for breakfast. And Gwynneth looks as if she hasn’t closed her eyes all night, and I believe her head is splitting.”

“ But Miss Gwynneth was in before twelve,” observed the housekeeper. “ I must say she is very considerate of her servants, and never lets Nancy wait up for her. She ought to have had a good night’s rest.”

“ Well, anyhow, she looks a pack of misery

this morning," continued the boy. "And when I'm grown up I'll never have parties on Saturday nights."

Gwynneth meanwhile lay on her bed, vainly seeking sleep. But her mind was too disturbed to rest, and she lay tossing from side to side, now thinking of Walter and Eva Stenton, and now of her own condition. She refused her lunch, and then fell into an uneasy doze, only awaking at Nancy's gentle knock, who, just before she went out, came to see if her young mistress wanted anything.

"No, nothing, thank you, Nancy," and was turning away when the maid remarked timidly :

"Perhaps you'd like to see Miss Margaret, miss?"

"See Miss Margaret?" repeated Gwynneth in surprise. "Whatever for, Nancy?"

Nancy coloured. She had unbounded faith in her teacher, and was shrewd enough to guess that her young mistress was in trouble.

"Oh, I thought it might cheer you up, miss," she stammered; "and—and—I'm sure she'd gladly come over, if you'd like to see her."

A sudden longing sprang up in the girl's heart.

"Well, Nancy, you can tell her I'm not very well, and if she is free this evening, and can come over, I'd be very glad to see her."

"Very well, miss." And Nancy, well pleased, went her way.

Gwynneth lay back on her pillows. Why had she sent for Margaret? What good could she do? But deep down in her heart Gwynneth felt that in her friend she would get the help she sought.

She did not expect her until six or seven o'clock, and so once more tried to sleep, having given orders that tea should be brought up at five o'clock. This time she did fall asleep, and slept long and soundly, only awaking by the door softly opening, and then Margaret stood beside her bed. For a moment she gazed at her friend in a bewildered way, but the next minute she sat up, and with a cry as of a tired child held out her arms, and let Margaret fold her to her breast.

"Oh, Margaret," she sobbed, "I'm so glad you've come! I'm so miserable."

For answer, Margaret only held her tighter.

"Poor little girl," she said softly, as she smoothed back the girl's tumbled hair; "so it has come at last! There, have it out; a good cry won't hurt you."

And Gwynneth did "have it out," sobbing as if her heart would break, and holding convulsively to her friend as if she would never let her go.

A knock at the door made Margaret rise. It was Nancy with the tea-tray. She sent her

round to the sitting-room with it, and then, pouring some water into a basin, induced Gwynneth to rise, and gently bathed her hot brow and cheeks, and brushed out and tidied her hair.

"Now you are going to give me some tea," said Margaret. "I've never had tea in your 'den,' as you call it. Come, I want a cup badly."

So Gwynneth went into her pretty sitting-room, and presently the two friends were sitting by the cosy fireside, and Gwynneth was feeling all the better for a cup of tea, not having tasted food since the morning. When they had finished, Margaret moved the tea-table away, and drawing the two chairs nearer to the fire, prepared for a chat. But Gwynneth slipped off her chair on to the hearthrug, and rested her tired head against her friend's knee.

They sat quietly for a time, only the firelight lighting up the room and the two girlish faces, both so different.

"Well, childie," said Margaret at length, her hands passing lovingly over the girl's soft hair, "now tell me all the trouble."

Gwynneth gave a little shiver. "It's all so wretched, Margaret, I don't know where to begin."

"Begin with yourself, that is the first cause of trouble generally, isn't it?"

And so Gwynneth began with herself. Going back to the beginning of her life, she told of her





mother's death, of her being brought up by her aunt, and of the shock she had received on hearing about her father for the first time. How far she was right to speak of family concerns outside her family she never stopped to think, but fortunately Margaret was one who knew how to hold her tongue about other people's concerns, and she had also that rare faculty of listening and never letting you feel her interest in your story flag.

She never spoke, but let Gwynneth pour out all her story, never even making a remark when the girl told of her visits to the Wishing Well, and of her feelings towards her father. She went on, telling of her arrival at Oaklands, her meeting with Walter and Hugh, and never ceased until she had told the history of the previous evening, with its revelations and misery.

Then she stopped, and a silence fell.

"Gwynneth, darling," said Margaret softly, "isn't it a grand thing that we have a Saviour Who is able and willing to save to the uttermost?"

Gwynneth looked up suddenly. She had expected words of rebuke, and had nerved herself to meet them. but instead she met the gaze of eyes full of sympathetic tears, and felt the pressure of Margaret's strong arms round her.

Was it any wonder she bowed her head and wept?

"Don't you see, dear, how God has been leading you up to this, step by step ? At last He has brought you to feel your need of *Him*, and how utterly unable you are to help or save yourself. He has shown you the empty hollowness of the world, and souls sinking in ruin, and has put into your heart a longing to help them, at the same time letting you see how unable you are to do so, because you are not sure of your own ground. Isn't that so ? "

Gwynneth nodded.

"Now look at the other side. God made you for Himself, and every hour we keep away from Him we are robbing God. He thought so much about us that He even died for us. Don't you think He has a right to us after that ? "

No reply, so Margaret went on. "I'm going to tell you a story. There was once a lad, headstrong and wild, who ran away from home, determined to have his own way. For a time he got on, but by and by he began to slip downhill, and in looking for work met a man who worked at road-blasting, and who said he could get him a job if he'd like to join him.

"The lad agreed, and the boy joined his new friend, living in his hut and sharing his food. By and by he began to notice the man's behaviour ; he never cursed or swore, he always asked a blessing at their simple meals, and prayed at

his bedside morning and evening. He did not say much, but his life was a living sermon, and gradually the boy began to respect and love his new friend, and he opened his heart to him and told him of his past life.

"One day the two friends were working together, where some blasting had taken place; a sudden noise made them look up, and they saw a large mass of earth and stones coming down upon them. It was the work of a moment for the man to spring forward and, giving the boy a push, put him out of danger, but the next instant the mass had fallen upon him, and he lay crushed and mangled under its weight.

"The boy's cry of horror soon brought help, and gently and carefully the man was raised and placed upon his bed, while with a bursting heart the lad bent over him. By and by he regained consciousness, and tried to smile into the boy's face.

" 'Don't grieve, lad,' he murmured, 'I'm glad you're all right. Don't fret for me.'

" 'But I do,' cried the boy in an agony of grief, 'your life is a valuable one, you have a wife and children. I am no good to any one, nothing but a bad lot; my life was not worth saving, it was not worth while.'

"With a look of love the man took the boy's hands in his: 'Lad, lad,' he said softly, 'make

it worth while, make it worth while,' and then he was gone."

Gwynneth was sitting up now, gazing with wide-open eyes into Margaret's face.

"And did he?" she asked.

"Yes. He returned home, gave his heart to God, and started afresh, going steadily on, and growing up into a noble, God-fearing man. He made it worth while. Gwynneth, will you?" No answer.

"The Lord Jesus thought *you* worth saving. For your sake and mine He thought it worth while to leave His beautiful home for thirty-three long years, and to live amongst those who only ill-treated and disbelieved in Him. What those thirty-three years must have been to God," went on Margaret reverently, "doing without Him in heaven, and seeing Him misunderstood and ill-treated on earth! Oh, Gwynneth, Gwynneth, hasn't He made it worth while to have every bit of us?"

Her earnest pleading reached the girl's heart. She raised herself and flung both arms round Margaret's neck.

"Oh, Margaret, only show me how," she cried, "and I'll give myself to Him altogether."

For answer her friend quietly sank on her knees, and in the quiet hush of that evening hour Gwynneth passed "over to the other side."

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## CHAPTER XVI

### BROUGHT TOGETHER

"This my reward—development  
From what I am, to what Thou art,  
For this I plead ;  
Wrought out by being wrought upon,  
By deeds reflective, done in love,  
For those in need."

CHARLES C. EARLE.

AND what about Ione ?

To the girl who had travelled little, her life in beautiful Cannes, with the waves of the blue Mediterranean constantly before her eyes, blue skies overhead, and flowers of every hue springing up on all sides, seemed like a fairy tale.

"Oh, Douglas, Douglas, isn't it glorious !" she would exclaim many times a day, and her brother would smile from his couch, well pleased to see her so happy. At first the change seemed to do him good ; he certainly grew fatter, and began to lose the pallid look in his face. But he never seemed to care to take exercise, and the weeks passed by, leaving him still weak and suffering.

Ione was his constant companion, reading to



him, and sitting by the hour chatting of all the interests in the place. Fortunately some old friends of her parents lived at Cannes, and through them they got to know several other families, so that the girl was not without companions.

But none of them made up for her brother, and she was never so happy as when by his side, absorbed in a game of chess, of which he was very fond, running his messages, or in some way or other helping him. And he warmly returned her devotion.

"By the way, Ione," he asked one day, with a twinkle in his eye, "do you ever write stories now?"

This was a family joke. Once in her childhood's days Ione had been inspired to write a tale. Its title was, "The Sorrows of a Boot Boy," and she had manfully worked at it, covering several sheets of manuscript paper. Just as it was finished Douglas had happened to come into the room, and seizing upon the last page, read out the closing tragic sentence:

"He bust into tires, and stank upon the doorstep!"

Poor little eight-year-old Ione! In her haste and eagerness her spelling had gone to the winds, and she never heard the end of her "sensational novel," as Douglas hereafter always called it!

(For the benefit of the public it might be well to mention that the end of the Boot Boy should read thus : "He burst into tears and sank upon the doorstep !")

But from that time no one had ever seen or heard anything more of her literary efforts, and her parents never dreamed that their daughter spent hours and hours writing and rewriting stories, poems, essays, never satisfied with her work, but always hoping to do something better.

Douglas' sudden question brought the colour to her cheeks.

"Ah, you haven't forgotten the 'Boot Boy' !" she replied, laughing. "My poor 'Boot Boy,' how you have teased me about him !"

He laughed too, but continued : "And have you never written anything more ?"

"Don't you think the 'Boot Boy' was enough for a lifetime ?" she replied, trying to evade his questions ; but her tell-tale face only increased his curiosity, and he went on :

"Come now, lone, open confession is good for the soul, you know. Make a clean breast of it, and tell me how you've employed your time all the years I've been away. Have no more stories come out of your active brain, eh ?"

Her face was very rosy now, and she bent down over her work. But Douglas took hold of

her hand and made her lift her eyes to his ; then he laughed.

"Your face is answer enough, little sister. Now let us make a bargain, that you trust me with your secret, and I'll act as critic, and give you my opinion free, gratis, and for nothing. Will that do ? "

"Oh, no ! no ! Douglas. I never show my writings to any one. No one has ever seen them since that ' Boot Boy ' business. I can't bear to be laughed at."

Her distress touched him.

"Ah, you do write, then ! I thought so. But, my dear little sister, I wouldn't hurt your feelings for anything, and am awfully sorry if my teasing has done so in the past. Come now, can't you trust me ? I'm in real earnest, Ione, and if I can help you I'd be awfully glad."

She looked up at last, and his smile reassured her.

"You'll promise not to tell a soul, Douglas ? "

"Yes, on my honour. I'll be as silent as the Sphinx."

So Ione had gone off to her room, returning with a large brown-paper parcel, which she deposited in her brother's lap, and then ran off laughing.

An exclamation burst from his lips when he opened it and began glancing through its con-

tents. His parents had gone out to spend the day with friends at Grasse, so he gave himself up to the investigation of the various MSS. in Ione's bundle. Some written in a childish hand he simply glanced at, and then set aside ; but as the handwriting changed, and he guessed by it the different stages of her growth, his interest deepened, and when he at last came to a roll of MS. tied carefully together, and found it contained a story of about a dozen chapters, he opened it and began to read it carefully. It was evidently one of her latest bits of work, and though only a child's story, it took hold of him. Here and there he detected faults in grammar and in the arrangement of sentences, but when he had finished reading it, he laid it down with a sigh, and fell into a reverie.

"To think of it," he murmured to himself, "that all these years this little mouse has been plodding on like this ! She's a little brick, and if I mistake not will make a name for herself yet by her pen ; and, please God, I'll help her all I can."

It was a very shy little face that looked at him over the teapot when the tea-tray was brought in ; but his smile reassured her, and the talk they had afterwards did so still more, as for a good hour they went over Ione's MSS., Douglas speaking a word of encouragement here, or pointing out

an error or mistake. By the time they had finished, and the precious bundle had once more been tied up and taken back to Ione's room, all fear of her brother's criticism had vanished, and Ione was completely won.

"I have kept out one MS., Ione," he remarked as she returned to him, and he held up her little story. "I want to look over this again. Now I'm going to take you in hand, and give you lessons. Say, will you go through a course of reading and essay writing with me?"

Ione's eyes sparkled, and he saw his case was won. Henceforth began new and delightful work for them both, and Ione forgot all about her MS., which still lay in her brother's possession.

He kept her busy, making her read certain books, and then write an account of them from memory. Any special outing ended in its written history finding its way into Douglas' hands, to be corrected or praised, or both. Thus, Ione began to get an ease and freedom in writing which she had not known before, and learned to condense and fashion her sentences in a different style.

And Douglas, well pleased at the progress his pupil was making, grew more and more proud of his little sister. She had trusted him and he valued her trust, and in return Ione grew to

know more of his inner life, and before long was convinced that her prayers had been answered, and that her loved brother had been truly converted to God.

But she learned the certainty of it before long.

The winter had passed away, and already the soft March days were at hand, but Douglas did not seem to gain much strength. This was a bitter disappointment to them all, though none of them liked to acknowledge it to the other.

One bright morning the brother and sister had gone out for a short stroll. Douglas never could walk far, and before long sat down to rest on a seat facing the blue waters of the sea. It was a lonely part of the shore, and they were both enjoying the sunshine when two gentlemen passed them, one a young man of about thirty-three years, and the other several years older. They passed close enough for the brother and sister to hear a few words of their conversation, and recognized the English language.

"Two Englishmen," remarked Ione, when they had passed on. "I wonder who they are. One is a clergyman, to judge by his collar."

"Yes; and the other is a doctor," laughed Douglas, "who has brought the parson abroad for his health," and they both laughed merrily over the little joke.

"By the way, I heard from Eddlewood this

morning," observed Ione, drawing a letter from her pocket, and never noticing the eager look that leapt into her brother's eyes as he recognized Margaret Elston's handwriting. "Shall I give you a few bits of news?"

"All of it, if you like," replied Douglas. How little Ione guessed how he longed to obtain possession of her letter and read it all himself! But he said no more, and she began to read:

"It has been very cold here. March has come in like a lion, and mother and Minnie are both laid up with bad colds. Fortunately Irene and I have escaped, and I still go up to London every week to help Mrs. Ivors with her mothers' meeting. The class keeps up well, and we have got three new members for the Reading Society. I hope you are able to keep up your reading, and do not find it difficult to obtain books. I have just finished reading the life of Mrs. Booth, and found it a real inspiration. Thank God such women have lived, and proved what God can do with such weak instruments as we are! Read the book if you come across it. It will help you.

"Gwynneth Davenant is getting on so well, and we have become fast friends. I think I told you how she gave her heart to Christ at the beginning of the year, and she has gone on so steadily since and is so anxious to help others. Through her I have got to know a girl named Eva Stenton. I

fancy you met her once at Lady Farrant's, and I want you to pray for her. She has a very unhappy home.

"We had such a delightful surprise last Sunday. Who should preach, morning and evening, but Mr. Beverley! You know it was he who led me to Christ seven years ago, and we have never met since. How good God has been to me all these years!—'not one word hath failed of all His good promise.' It has been worth while to trust Him, even while the clouds have been darkest."

Ione stopped suddenly and glanced at her brother. He was gazing fixedly out on the sunlit sea. Had he heard, had he cared for what she had been reading? She folded up the letter and slipped it into her pocket and then jumped up and ran down to the shore, but Douglas sat on, thinking. Every word of Margaret's letter had sunk into his heart, but he had not dared to trust himself to speak. When a quarter of an hour later Ione sauntered back, she found the two Englishmen, who had passed her an hour ago, sitting with Douglas, and all three evidently enjoying a chat. She slipped into her place beside her brother and listened, but it did not interest her much, and she found herself wondering who they were and if Douglas had been right about the doctor and the parson. Douglas, meanwhile, was puzzled, too; but not exactly in the same



way. He could not shake off the impression that somewhere or other he had seen this clergyman before, but though the latter more than once mentioned his friend's name, calling him Trent, and in conversation let out that he had come from London, "Trent," on the other hand, never addressed the other by name, or let fall any hint as to where he had come from, so all Douglas gathered was that they had arrived only the day before and did not intend making a long stay. After they had rested they rose, and raising their hats walked away towards the town. Shortly after the brother and sister sauntered home, Douglas still haunted by the certainty that the clergyman was no stranger to him.

All the rest of the day he found himself repeating, "Where have I met that chap before?" And he fell asleep that night haunted by the same question. Morning did not solve the mystery, and he determined to put it aside, and suggested another stroll with Ione.

They took another route, and Ione was charmed to find some exquisite flowers growing wild, such as at home would have been carefully grown in a greenhouse, but here sprang up on all sides. She filled her hands, and then they made a little detour and found themselves on the same road as the previous day, and to Douglas'

satisfaction, close to the same seat, for he felt tired and gladly took possession of it.

Ione was soon engrossed with her flowers, when suddenly her brother exclaimed, "I have it as last! And I do declare, there they are again! Look, Ione, look; down there, walking along the shore, the two gentlemen we met here yesterday. Run, little one, and ask the parson if he would be kind enough to speak to me a minute. Mind, I only want the parson."

Ione, too astonished for words, placed her flowers on the seat, and seeing the two gentlemen gradually disappearing, put wings to her feet and sped away after them.

They heard her running steps, and stopped just as, flushed and panting, she came up to them, so out of breath that she could hardly give her message, and her listeners looked amused.

"Excuse me," began Ione, taking a long breath between each word, "but my brother is very anxious to see you for a moment," and then looked at the clergyman. "Only you," she added, as both gentlemen turned back.

"Oh, then I can remain behind," remarked the younger man with a laugh, and his friend with a nod set out with Ione to seek Douglas.

Ione was too shy to respond much to the remarks of her companion, but her astonishment

was great when she saw Douglas come to meet them with outstretched hand and heard him say :

" I must apologize for asking you to return to me, sir, but I am almost a cripple, and I have an idea I have met you before. Is your name Beverley ? "

" Yes, it is," replied the clergyman, grasping the young officer's hand, " but I don't think I have the pleasure of knowing you."

" Probably not, and when I tell you my name is Douglas Edgerton, a captain in Her Majesty's army, I don't suppose you will be much the wiser. But I am heartily glad to have met you. Have you a few minutes to spare ? "

" Certainly, as long as you like," replied Mr. Beverley, taking a seat beside Douglas, and then, seeing him glance at Ione, who was listening eagerly to their conversation, and divining his thoughts, he turned courteously to her and remarked, " What lovely flowers ; how my friend yonder would like to see them ! Would you mind showing them to him ?—he is a first-class botanist."

In an instant Ione's thoughts flew to another channel, and, gathering up her treasures, she went off with a smile to where Mr. Trent stood at a little distance.

" I think my brother and Mr. Beverley are going to have a chat," she remarked, " and Mr.

Beverley thought you'd like to see these," and she held up her beautiful blossoms.

"Ah, this is a treat! Shall we sit here, and I'll put you through your facings, and give you a lesson in botany?"

They both laughed, and for the next half-hour Ione had such a treat as she had never imagined possible to be got out of a bunch of flowers. A new world was opened to her. Her companion evidently knew and loved his subject.

Meanwhile, the two on the seat, once alone together, were not long in exchanging confidences.

"Where have we met?" asked the clergyman kindly, turning towards the young officer and gazing at him steadily with a pair of keen blue eyes.

Douglas met his glance unflinchingly, and paused; then he answered slowly: "In Eddlewood church, seven years ago, when you asked me one evening if I knew Jesus Christ as my own Saviour, and—and—I told you to mind your own business."

Again he paused. A bright smile of remembrance lit up his listener's face, but he only nodded, so Douglas went on.

"You told me that was just what you were doing, and that rather floored me. Mr. Beverley, I have found out you were right and I was all

wrong. But God had to take me right away to South Africa and bring me face to face with Himself on the veldt there, surrounded by the dead and dying, before I'd give in. Your sermon on 'They wrap it up!' has never faded from my mind."

"Thank God!" burst from Mr. Beverley's lips, and he turned away his head, but not before Douglas saw that his eyes were filled with tears. They were both much moved, and remained silent for a short time. Then Douglas spoke again:

"Ever since I saw you yesterday I have been puzzling over who you were. I have a good memory for faces, and was certain we had met before. But it only flashed upon me ten minutes ago, and then you and your friend suddenly appeared. Odd, wasn't it?"

"No, because—

'There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.'

He who spoke to your soul seven years ago has, in His infinite love, given me the joy of hearing this story from your lips, and of once more proving His faithfulness and how our labour is not in vain."

"Well, Mr. Beverley, I am thankful to have had this opportunity of meeting you, and trust

we may meet again, but I should like first to apologize for my rudeness to you that night. It's rather a long while back, but, nevertheless, I'm heartily ashamed of it. Will you forgive me ? ”

For answer the elder man gripped his hand.

“ My dear lad, don't ever mention that again. ‘ The past is under the blood. ’ I never remember things of that kind, at least with bad feeling ; souls hardly seem to know what they say when they are under conviction. Now, will you tell me how you came to Christ ? ”

And so Douglas began, and opened his heart to this true man of God. He told of his early life, and being brought up in and for the world, of his delight and pride at entering the army ; touched again on the mission, and said he had been induced to go to it at the earnest request of a friend, but no more ; passed on to his life in India, where in gaiety and worldliness he had sought to drown all serious thought ; of his regiment, instead of being ordered home, being sent to South Africa ; of the horrors of the war, and then of his being wounded and God meeting him as he lay nigh unto death on the open veldt. The young man did not say much, but quite enough for his listener to read between the lines, and see how real and deep a work had been done.

"And now," said Douglas in conclusion, "I'm just tied by the leg. I've been ordered abroad, but I don't seem to gain strength. None of the doctors seems to know what's the matter with me."

He spoke despondently, and Mr. Beverley looked his sympathy.

"I wonder if you'd let my friend Trent have a look at you?" he asked. "He is high up in his profession, and I can speak personally of his skill."

Douglas laughed. "How funny!" he exclaimed. "When Ione and I first saw you, we were speculating as to who you both were. You, of course, we recognized as a parson, and I laughingly told my sister Mr. Trent was a doctor, who had brought you abroad for your health."

It was Mr. Beverley's turn to laugh now. "Well, you made a pretty good hit, only he hasn't exactly brought me. We met in Paris, and I was delighted to meet an old friend, and so we decided to travel together. But he is expecting a medical friend daily, with whom he is going on a walking tour, so I don't suppose we shall be together for long. Let me introduce you to him."

On Douglas acquiescing, he went off to where Doctor Trent and Ione were seated, still engrossed with the flowers, and having dispatched

the former to Douglas, he took his place, and soon won the girl's confidence by his bright manner and interest. Ione looked up at him shyly.

"Are you the Mr. Beverley who had a mission at Eddlewood long ago, and preached there last Sunday?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, taken with Ione's simple girlish manner. He had daughters of his own.

"And how did you know I preached there last Sunday?"

"Oh, Margaret Elston told me. I had a letter from her this morning."

"Then you know Miss Elston? What a nice girl she is, and how earnest!"

Ione's face glowed. "There's no one like Margaret!" she exclaimed, well pleased to have so appreciative a listener. "She's my dearest and best friend!"

Mr. Beverley smiled.

"You must have some good reason for loving her so much."

"Yes, I have, indeed. Margaret led me to Jesus."

"Ah, that is reason enough; no tie can be stronger, and I am glad indeed you have such a friend. I hope you are following her example, and seeking to win others too."

Ione was silent, but her smile was answer.



## CHAPTER XVII

### INTO THE HEART OF THINGS

“ ‘Thou shalt remember’—oh ! far less,  
The toil, and pain, and dread,  
Than the unfailing tenderness  
With which thy steps He led ;  
The love that lightened thy distress,  
And raised thy drooping head.”

NETTA LEIGH.

THE events of that week seemed always like a dream to Douglas Edgerton, as he looked back upon them in after years.

It did not take long for the kindly, skilful doctor to win his confidence, and he allowed himself to be questioned up and down, and finally consented to undergo a thorough examination on the morrow, not knowing until afterwards that he was putting himself into the hands of one of the rising men in London.

As soon as Mr. Beverley heard of the coming examination, he at once volunteered his services, saying :

“ If I can be of any service to you, Edgerton, don’t hesitate to make use of me. Shall I come with Trent to-morrow ? ”

And Douglas, meeting his kindly eye, gladly accepted his offer.

It was a great surprise to both the General and Mrs. Edgerton when they heard all that had happened ; and when later on in the evening both gentlemen called and talked matters over, they could not help feeling grateful for such unexpected kindness. But neither felt very confident as to results.

Before saying "good night," Mr. Beverley turned to Mrs. Edgerton and said :

"We have met under most peculiar circumstances, Mrs. Edgerton, and I cannot help feeling, as well as my friend Trent here, that God has some plan in it. We don't know what a day may bring forth ; so would it not be helpful if we had some prayer together, and asked our heavenly Father to guide us, and make everything successful, if His will ?"

Mrs. Edgerton looked thunderstruck. Never had such a proposal been made in her house before, and she glanced timidly at her husband. But he was standing bolt upright, so she said softly :

"Herbert, Mr. Beverley suggests our having some prayer about Douglas. Shall we, dear ?"

"By all means," responded the General ; and so the little company knelt down together, while the clergyman poured out his heart to

God, thanking Him for past mercies, and praying that the son of the house might be restored to health again.

When they rose, not one eye was dry, as they shook hands with their visitors ere they departed.

"Anne," observed the General, as an hour later he and his wife retired to bed, "we've been married nearly forty years, and this is the first time a parson has ever suggested having prayer with us. I like that fellow Beverley; he rings true."

And never in after years had the General occasion to change his opinion.

Doctor Trent's examination was a very thorough one, and when he insisted upon the X-rays being brought into requisition, all felt he suspected something serious; and he was right, for it was found that a portion of a bullet had never been dislodged, and this would entail an operation. "Not necessarily a very serious one, but undoubtedly it must be done if sound health is to be regained."

And so it was decided, and the doctor undertook to find an English nurse, and also said that a medical friend of his was expected daily, who would assist him, he felt sure.

The poor General and Mrs. Edgerton were much to be pitied. They could settle to nothing, and kept hovering round their son, as if afraid

to let him out of their sight, and then Lone came to the rescue; for seeing how much their attentions tried her brother, she did her utmost to engage her parents' interest elsewhere, and was not wholly unsuccessful. A hurried line went to Margaret, telling her what had occurred, and asking for special prayer for Douglas, and adding the news of Mr. Beverley's unexpected appearance, and what a comfort he was proving to them all.

We need not dwell on the following events, further than to say the operation took place, and no one could have had more skilful nursing and care than was given by the two doctors and Nurse Browne. It was a wonder to Doctor Trent how Douglas had gone on as long as he had in his trying condition, and predicted a speedy recovery. Then, having seen him fairly started, he handed him over to the local doctor, and started on his walking tour with his friend Doctor Hughes.

But Mr. Beverley remained behind. The beautiful air of Cannes was doing him good, and he declared he might just as well remain there as anywhere else, for a warm friendship had sprung up between him and Douglas.

It was on one bright day that the young officer, sufficiently recovered to be lying on the couch, had been left in the care of his friend

while the nurse went for a walk, that he opened his heart to the latter and told him the history of his love for Margaret and how he had lost her. Mr. Beverley was keenly interested.

"That was the girl I met at Eddlewood the Sunday before I came abroad," he said, "and you haven't seen her for seven years?"

"Yes, once; she came to see us off at the station. She and my sister are great chums."

"So I believe, for she tells me Miss Elston led her to Christ. A strong tie, that, Edgerton."

Douglas gave a ready response.

"And does your sister know of your love for Miss Elston?"

"Ione! Oh, dear, no; no one has ever known of it. Why should they? It can never be. Let it rest."

He lay back with a sigh amongst his pillows, and his eyes had a far-away look in them.

"Why should you say that? 'More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.'"

"But, Mr. Beverley, how could I ever expect Margaret Elston to marry me, even though the great barrier is gone and we are one in Christ? Do you think I'd ever ask her to link her life to such a broken-down man as I am?"

Mr. Beverley looked into the young man's face with one of his sunny smiles.

"How little you know of the nature of a true woman, Edgerton!" he said. "Don't you know we always love our broken toys best? But, please God, you may, and will, yet be nearly as strong as ever. Even if it were not so, from what I have seen of the girl you love, and from what you have told me, she would rather have you just as you are than not at all. Meanwhile wait; don't be in a hurry. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' God will make it all clear as you trust Him."

A light came into Douglas' face.

"Then you really think it wouldn't be mean of me to think of her still?"

"Mean! My dear boy, love never speaks of meanness. You get strong, and you'll look at things in a different light, and by God's grace I'll help at your wedding yet!"

This speech had the desired effect, and Douglas brightened up, declaring he would keep Mr. Beverley to his promise of helping to tie the knot.

From that day Douglas rapidly improved, and when Mr. Beverley returned to England the General and his family moved to Switzerland, there to spend the summer, but looking forward to welcoming both the clergyman and the two doctors, to whose skill they owed so much, to their home in Eddlewood before many months were over.

More than once they had heard from Doctor Trent, and twice he had sent Ione boxes of flowers, specimens he had picked up during his walking tour, to encourage her in her botanical studies, so he said.

To Gwynneth life had broadened and brightened. Brightened, that is to say, so far as her own personal inner life was concerned, but with a continual ache for Walter lurking in its depths. After earnest prayer she had ventured to speak to him after Lady Farrant's party. Lovingly and earnestly she had pleaded, and at first he seemed strangely moved by her appeal. Then his face had hardened, and he had turned away with a scowl.

"Look here, Gwynneth," he had exclaimed, "it's all rot, your talking to me! You don't understand things—girls never do. I must have money, that's the long and short of it, and I can't afford not to make it when I get the chance!"

"But, Walter, surely father supplies you with money. And, after all, getting money at cards can't be called an honourable way of gain. Think of those from whom you get it, and what it means to them!"

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed her brother, with a laugh. "All's fair in love and war. Of course, the pater gives me money, but I never have

enough. An officer must have cash," he added grandly.

"You're not one yet," retorted Gwynneth, somewhat unwisely. "Sandhurst is only a college. If you are so extravagant now, what will it be when you join the army? And, Walter," she added, "what would your mother have said to this?"

At mention of his mother the lad's face changed, and he turned upon her fiercely.

"What do *you* know about my mother?" he cried. "What right have *you* to mention her to me?"

"A very good right, for I know she was a sweet, good woman. I have heard this from various sources, and I am sure she would have done her best to help her elder son to show a good example to her younger one."

The arrow went home, and Walter sank down in a chair and bowed his head in his hands with a groan.

"Gwynneth, my mother was a saint, and I'm not worthy to be her son. But it's too late now, I'm in the thick of things and can't stop. Only—keep Hugh straight if you can."

Gwynneth came over and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Dear Walter, it's not too late. You're only a boy still. Of course, I'll help Hugh ~~all~~ I can ;





The arrow went home, and Walter sank down in a chair with  
a groan (page 276)



I love him already ; but won't you let me help you ? Oh, Walter, Walter, do give up cards ! They will be your ruin. What would father say if he knew ? ”

At mention of his father the hard look returned to the lad's face ; he got up and shook off his sister's hand.

“ Father ! Why, it would be the pot calling the kettle black ! ” he exclaimed. “ Ask him where he raises his money, Gwynneth,” and he strode away, only pausing at the door to add, as he looked back :

“ All the same, I believe you're a brick.”

He was gone, but Gwynneth remained rooted to the spot.

“ Ask him where he raises his money ” rang in her ears. Was it possible that her father, too, went in for this sort of thing ? The very thought turned her sick. She could not, dare not, ask him, and she had no further opportunity of saying more to Walter, who studiously avoided her until his return to Sandhurst. So she and Hugh were more than ever thrown together, and a warm friendship sprang up between them, Gwynneth feeling really lonely when he returned to school. Of her father she saw less and less ; she never knew where he went, only sometimes he said business called him abroad, and he would be away for a week or fortnight, at other

times for a night or two in town. And so the spring days passed away, and summer also. She found plenty to do, and became more and more interested in her music and studies, and made friends with girls in different directions.

To her surprise, not long after Lady Farrant's Twelfth Night entertainment, she had a visit from Eva Stenton and her mother.

The latter, a faded-looking, tall, thin woman, said she had come to thank Gwynneth for so kindly bringing her daughter home that night, adding : "What delightful entertainments Lady Farrant gives! I was so disappointed not to have been able to go, but was too ill at the time."

Gwynneth glanced at Eva. There was a wicked twinkle in that young lady's eye. Before the former could reply Mrs. Stenton went on :

"My daughter tells me you have not been long in Eddlewood. I hope you like it. The society is considered good, but for my part I consider it rather slow."

"I think Eddlewood very pretty," replied Gwynneth; "and having come from a very quiet place, Eddlewood seems to me quite a gay place! People have been very kind to me, and I like Miss Edgerton and the Elstons very much."

Mrs. Stenton looked up. "Ah, you know the Elstons, do you? I have heard of them. Nice girls, but too religious, from all accounts. I

have met the General and Mrs. Edgerton. You know their daughter, Eva, don't you ? ”

“ Yes, mother, a quiet little mouse. Couldn't get anything out of her.”

Gwynneth smiled to herself. And that was what Eva Stenton called *knowing* a girl ? Why, she hadn't even broken the outer shell ! But inwardly Gwynneth resolved to get Eva Stenton into touch with Margaret Elston, if possible. She felt the girl was beyond her, and hoped Margaret, with her large experience, might be a help to her.

Soon after, this she accomplished, for having invited Eva to tea, she had Margaret to meet her, and once acquainted, the latter took care to keep up the friendship. Not that they were in any way alike. No greater contrast could have been found, and naturally Eva was a girl from whom Margaret would have turned with disgust. Shallow, badly educated, loud in voice and manner and thoroughly worldly, there was nothing she had in common with her, but Margaret saw beyond these things. In the cold, unresponsive marble, she saw the angel the great Master longed to carve out of it, and for His sake she held on and did her best to win this poor lost unsatisfied soul for Him. She would have been highly amused had she heard Eva describing her to an acquaintance. “ I like that Margaret Elston. There's a

true ring about her, no humbug. Some good people rub you up the wrong way, she never does. They try to make you good and lead you to heaven, but stick pins in you all the way ; she doesn't."

No ; Margaret did not. Her mother spoke truly when she said : " My daughters make a sweet climate for me to live in ! " Would that it were true of all daughters ! And so the months glided on, and once more Gwynneth welcomed Hugh home for his Easter holidays, and later on for his summer ones too. The boy saw nothing of his father or brother at Easter, his father having gone abroad, and Walter spent his vacation with a friend.

Mr. Davenant never thought about Gwynneth going away, and though she longed earnestly for a sight of the sea, she said nothing, but threw herself into Hugh's amusements, and many happy expeditions they made together, sometimes spending the whole day fishing, or joining some friends for a picnic, with plenty of croquet, cricket, and tennis thrown in.

Yes, they were happy days, and it was not until after years that Gwynneth realized how truly she had won the heart of her young brother by taking part in his interests, and how the seed sown here and there by loving acts and earnest words bore fruit in his life.

"I've a brick of a sister," he had told a school-fellow; "there's not another girl can hold a candle to her!"

The Farrants were away all the summer, but returned in time for Christmas, and to welcome their nephew from India, with his baby son.

Percy Thorpe was in the Civil Service, and had a good appointment in Madras. His young wife had died some three years previously, and Lady Farrant was looking forward with great delight to taking possession of little Robin, who was to be left in her charge when his father returned to India.

Gwynneth was very fond of children, and her heart went out to this morsel of humanity the first moment she saw him. His great brown eyes shining out from his little pale face appealed to her strangely, and she no longer disliked going to Lady Farrant's when there was a prospect of a game with the boy, who took to her from the first and always followed her about like a dog.

Lady Farrant used to laugh quietly to herself on seeing the two going off quietly together, and generally managed to send her nephew after them, much to Gwynneth's disgust, who, while loving the child, never felt drawn to his father, whose long narrow face and closely-set steel-grey eyes always repulsed her. She was surprised to hear her father speak highly of him, praising

his talents which had gained him a high position in India, and declaring him to be a thoroughly good fellow. Gwynneth kept silence, but something in her heart denied her father's statement.

But as the months went by she found herself meeting him more constantly, and was sorry to find that he and Walter appeared to be great friends, the latter often bringing him home to lunch or dinner during his holidays, or managing to meet him at friends' houses.

How thankful Gwynneth felt when another Christmas season was past, and Walter once more away! Mr. Thorpe also set out on a round of visits, so Gwynneth could play with wee Robin in peace; and with the spring General Edgerton and his family returned. All through their absence Ione had kept up a regular correspondence with her friends, and now returned, having gained her majority, radiant in her young womanhood.

Eighteen months had made a great difference in the shy quiet girl; her smile was as sweet as ever, and her step as light and dancing, but there was a quiet dignity about her now, and a self-possession which she had hitherto lacked.

"And oh, Margaret!" exclaimed the girl, as she flung her arms round her friend, "how good God has been to us! Fancy, Douglas is nearly as well as ever. The doctors don't think he will



ever be fit for active service again, but it doesn't really matter, though I think he is a bit disappointed, for you know old Uncle Harcourt, mother's brother, died a few months ago, and has left Douglas his property in Scotland. Such a lovely house, standing in a park. He's there now, and says he is going to live there; but we think it will be rather lonely for him, and father and mother can't spare me to live with him. I tell him he must get married, but he always laughs and says, 'Who'd have a disabled soldier?' Dear old Douglas! Oh, you don't know what a good brother he is!"

Here Ione danced off to greet Irene and Minnie, leaving Margaret very rosy, and deeply interested in a piece of braid which had ripped round the bottom of her dress.

It was strange what a long time it took to arrange, and necessitated its owner going for a needle and thread, and being away quite twenty minutes.

But her face was wreathed in smiles for the rest of the day.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### WEDDING BELLS

"I would be true, for there are those who trust me ;  
I would be pure, for there are those who care ;  
I would be strong, for there is much to suffer ;  
I would be brave, for there is much to dare.

"I would be friend of all—the foe, the friendless ;  
I would be giving, and forget the gift ;  
I would be humble, for I know my weakness ;  
I would look up—and laugh—and love—and lift."

HOWARD ARNOLD WALTER.

IT was a sweet May morning when Margaret met Douglas Edgerton again. No, she could not be mistaken in that tall, upright figure, every inch a soldier, which stood by Ione in church that Sunday morning, and then Ione had turned round, and, catching her eye, had given her one of her sweetest smiles, and Margaret knew she was right.

It seemed quite natural that they should join one another in the church porch, Ione pairing off with Irene, and leaving her brother to Margaret. Quite natural that, as in the old days, he should take possession of her books and carry

them for her, only as they drew near Pine Grove, he remarked :

“ I am coming to see you this afternoon ; may I ? ”

“ No,” replied Margaret, a twinkle in her eye ; “ I am always engaged on Sunday afternoons.”

“ Ah, true, I forgot your Bible-class. Then I will say to-morrow morning. Yes,” he added in a lower voice, a smile on his face, “ in the rose garden.”

Their eyes met, and he knew she understood. After long years their parting there had not been forgotten. What true woman ever forgets ?

And there once more they met.

She was glad Irene had been called away to town that morning, that Minnie was busy housekeeping, that her mother was engrossed in answering letters. Glad that it seemed so natural she should take down her basket and scissors, and make her way to the flowers, where the sun was shining and birds singing all round. So glad, that her heart was singing, too, and the words fell clear and sweet from her lips, because she couldn't help it :

“ My heart is resting, O my God,  
I will give thanks and sing ;  
My heart is at the secret source  
Of every precious thing.

"And a new song is in my mouth,  
To long-loved music set ;  
Glory to Thee for all the grace  
I have not tasted yet !"

"Margaret !" said a voice at her elbow. She had not heard his footsteps on the soft grass, but now two strong hands held her fast and turned her round, till her face, rosy as the roses in her basket, looked up into his,

"You have kept your tryst," he said gently. She smiled.

"My darling, I have come back to you," he continued, taking her basket out of her hand and laying it on the grass, while he drew her under the shade of the beech trees. "Yes, and *for* you. Will you have me now ?"

She was silent, only her eyes asked the question her lips refused to frame.

"I have come back to you broken and partly disabled. I shall never be the man I was, Margaret, so the doctors tell me ; but still, I'm not quite a cripple."

He laughed, but there were tears in her eyes. He continued :

"Physically I may be far from what I was, or hoped to be. But, Margaret, I have found out you were right and I was wrong. Proud, impulsive, headstrong ! Oh, what I have missed ! But 'He hath weakened my strength in the way.'

‘I was at ease, but He hath broken me asunder.’ I never had so much sympathy with Job as I have had the last two years.”

Still Margaret was silent, only the clear glance of her eyes and the light pressure of her hand told how earnestly she was listening.

“My darling, some one has said, ‘The being broken is painful, to be broken is bliss,’ and it is true. I have learned to love the Hand that has broken me, because the same Hand has brought me healing and rest. ‘As many as touched *Him* were made perfectly whole.’ There are no barriers between us now, Margaret, and I have come to get your answer to the old question. I have hesitated, because I have now so little to offer you—a body that has been battered about, and——”

“A pure soul, washed in the blood of Christ,” suddenly broke in Margaret, her whole soul in her eyes, “and a heart that has been true to me all these years. Oh, Douglas, Douglas, is *that* nothing?”

Her head suddenly drooped, and he put his arm around her and placed her on the seat under the beeches.

Let us leave them there. What they said further is no concern of ours.

That afternoon Ione went over to pay Gwynneth a visit, her face radiant with happiness.

"Gwynneth!" she exclaimed, as soon as they were alone, "congratulate me. I'm the happiest girl in the world!"

Gwynneth smiled. "Are you going to be married, Ione?" she asked mischievously.

"Married? Rubbish!" she replied. "But some one else is—yes, two people; just guess."

But Gwynneth refused, so Ione continued:

"Why, Douglas and Margaret—there!"

"Douglas and Margaret?" repeated Gwynneth. "Your brother Douglas—Captain Edgerton? Oh, Ione, I am so glad!" and she gave her friend a hearty kiss.

"It's all so wonderful," went on Ione, well pleased to have a ready listener. "Fancy, it comes out now he has loved her over eight years. That beats Jacob! I might have guessed she loved him by the way she used to pray for him and talk to me about him. But I'm such a goose—never see things—and it never dawned upon me. I wish you had seen all our faces at lunch when Douglas walked in, and after taking his place, and father asked him where he had been all the morning, he said as coolly as possible: 'Seeking a wife, sir, and I've got her too!' Father dropped his knife and fork, and mother nearly choked. Then he turned to me and said: 'I think Ione can tell you who she is.' I was so utterly taken aback I could think of nothing. Everything was

all in a jumble inside ; but Douglas smiled, and with a flash it came to me, and I said, ' Margaret ! ' Oh, I wish you had seen his face then ! ”

Gwynneth was deeply interested.

“ I hope your parents are pleased,” she remarked.

“ Yes, very ; Gwynneth, to tell you the truth, I doubt if they would have been a year ago ; but I can't help seeing they are both changed. It's since Douglas' operation. You know that good Mr. Beverley was with us a great deal then, and how he used to pray and talk to us. Oh, if only you had heard him ! Dad and mother grew quite fond of him ; and as to Douglas, he thinks there's no man like him. It all seems so wonderful how God brought us all together, and Dr. Trent and Dr. Hughes turning up, and——”

“ Who did you say ? ” interrupted Gwynneth.

“ Dr. Trent and Dr. Hughes.”

“ Hughes ? I hadn't heard of him. Where did *he* come from ? ”

“ I'm sure I don't know. He was a friend of Dr. Trent's, and they had arranged to meet at Cannes and go on a walking tour together. But when Dr. Trent saw Douglas, he said he'd undertake the operation himself, and then he got his friend to help him. Wasn't it good of him ? Why, Mr. Beverley told us Dr. Trent

is thought no end of in London, and we could not have had a cleverer man."

But Gwynneth was in a brown study. The name of Hughes had brought up many memories. "But after all it's a common enough name, so why should I imagine things?" she said to herself, and giving herself a little shake, turned once more to Ione.

"Well, I must be off," exclaimed the latter, jumping up. "I am to bring Margaret back to tea. Oh, won't she be the sweetest sister in the world!"

A kiss, and she danced away; but the room seemed strangely dark. It had suddenly flashed upon Gwynneth what Margaret's marriage would mean to *her*, and how dear this friend had grown. Life without Margaret to go to seemed black indeed. She was the only one who knew about her home troubles, and it had become so natural to run over to Pine Grove and, like Ione, consult her friend about many things. Then her music and violin, who would practise so patiently with her? and—the Bible-class. Here Gwynneth gave a gasp. The class without Margaret seemed an impossibility.

Ah, Gwynneth, you have yet to learn "God buries His workers, but carries on His work." A work that depends upon the worker, and that only draws the people round him or



her self, is not work that will stand the fire. We want so to instil into our Bible-class members true hunger for, and love of, the Word of God, that they will come to our gatherings for *that*, and consequently will not mind who breaks to them the bread, so long as they are fed. And this is what Margaret had sought to do. Poor Gwynneth ! she dropped her face in her hands, and a few tears trickled through her fingers. Then she resolutely wiped them away.

“ How selfish I am ! ” she exclaimed. “ Crying over what means so much happiness to her. And, after all, she is not gone yet ; plenty of things may happen before she does go, and I know she’d tell me to say my text, ‘ I will trust and not be afraid. ’ Yes, I will. ”

And she did.

Captain Edgerton’s engagement seemed to give general satisfaction, although many, like Gwynneth, wondered who would fill Margaret’s place.

The engagement was not to be a long one ; no need for that, considering how long they had known one another ; and so the wedding was arranged for the first of September, and to her great joy Gwynneth was asked to be one of the bridesmaids. Irene and Ione were to be two more, and the others three girl friends in the place, Minnie Elston declaring she was too old for

such frivolities, and would be needed to help in other directions !

The pleasant summer days glided by, so full of work and preparations for the coming wedding, and Margaret seemed to be everywhere, selecting, advising, helping, always the same bright presence, carrying an atmosphere of love and peace and brightness with her. But the days which were so full of joy and happiness to her were far different to Gwynneth. A cloud seemed to overshadow her home, which every day grew blacker and blacker. Walter was growing more and more reckless ; so at last one day she ventured to speak to her father about him, asking him if he knew of his son's habits.

Mr. Davenant laughed.

"My dear child," he exclaimed in his easy-going way, "don't trouble your head about such matters. Why, every young fellow must have his fling, and sow his wild oats. Walter is a good chap, and I believe we will all have reason to be proud of him yet. He's clever and shrewd ; don't fear for him. He's well able to look after himself."

So saying the fond father had gone off, leaving Gwynneth more in despair than ever.

He had got into a way of turning up at odd times, without letting them know, so she never felt safe, or knew when he might suddenly put in

an appearance. A change, too, seemed to have come over her father ; he grew moody and often was lost in thought, and, alas ! more than once Gwynneth felt sure had taken more wine than was good for him.

And so the days went by, and at length the wedding day arrived.

Folk afterwards declared it was the prettiest wedding that had ever taken place in Eddlewood.

Of course, Mr. Beverley came to help the Vicar tie the knot, and, of course, Dr. Trent attended as best man ; and what more natural than that he and Ione should go about together, recalling old times ?

"I'm awfully sorry Hughes couldn't come," remarked Captain Edgerton to his best man, "but he couldn't get away. However, he says he has business in this direction the end of October and hopes to look us up. We'll be back from our honeymoon by then, so it will just fit."

And neither of the gentlemen guessed in the least how nearly the doctor's business would affect one of the guests that day.

Very loving and tender had been Margaret's embrace as she bade farewell to Ione and Gwynneth. They were standing together, the former radiant and jubilant at having at length secured a sister, the latter quiet and tearful, as she realized how near was the parting.

"God bless you, my darlings," said Margaret softly. "I know you will help Irene all you can to keep up the work. She will need it. And, Gwynneth, live looking up, dear; I shall often think of and pray for you, and remember you are to pay us a visit next summer!"

And then the Captain had called her, and she was gone amid a shower of rice and rose-leaves.

The two girls stood arm in arm watching the carriage drive away. They stood watching and waving after the others had gone in, and then Gwynneth turned to Ione and said wistfully:

"Ione, I think one of the most beautiful things in the world is to have the love of a good man."

## CHAPTER XIX

### WHO WAS THE THIEF?

"Think, then, and some day you will feel also—no morbid passion of Pity . . . but the steady fire of perpetual Kindness."—RUSKIN.

SEPTEMBER brought back Percy Thorpe. He had been travelling about and visiting friends all the summer, and now came back to Sir James Farrant's hospitable roof to spend the remainder of his leave in the company of his baby boy.

English air and attention had worked wonders in the small boy, who had now a beautiful colour and was very unlike the puny child who had been brought from India nearly a year previously.

During the summer Gwynneth used constantly to be at Lady Farrant's, drawn thither by her love for the child; but when his father returned, she discontinued her visits, not caring for his company. Strange to say, her father noticed it, and one day asked for an explanation.

Gwynneth coloured. "I do not care for Mr. Thorpe, father," she answered frankly. "When

I am at Lady Farrant's I see more of him than I like, so I stay away."

A frown gathered on Mr. Davenant's brow.

"What fools girls are!" he muttered, then aloud, "I don't understand your not liking Thorpe. He is a right good fellow, and it is my express wish that you go as usual to Lady Farrant's. Many a girl would be only too glad to have attentions from a man like Thorpe."

Gwynneth raised her head and looked straight at her father.

"No right-minded girl would," she said slowly. "Wealth and position are not character!"

Mr. Davenant's colour rose. He got up and faced her.

"How dare you speak like that of one of my friends!" he demanded. "You don't know what you are doing. I am in difficulties, Gwynneth—no matter what—and Thorpe can help me out of them. Promise me you'll be civil to him, that you'll—you'll—try to like him, that you'll——"

He did not finish, but the hand he laid on her arm trembled.

A strange new strength seemed to have come to Gwynneth.

"I can never promise to like a bad man, father, for *bad* I know he is. He has led Walter

astray ; I know it, from things I have heard Walter say, and such a man can never be *my* friend."

Her calmness staggered him. Then his passion burst forth.

"Gwynneth, I believe the man loves you, wants to make you his wife. It'll be the making of you. Don't be a fool, girl, and throw away such a chance, or else—or else—you leave my house !"

Gwynneth rose and gazed at him steadily. She saw it all now.

"I can leave your house at any time you wish, father," she answered ; "but to be the wife of Percy Thorpe—that I can never be."

And she left the room.

With a groan Mr. Davenant sank into a chair. He was heavily in debt, and had counted upon Gwynneth making a brilliant marriage. Thorpe, he knew, would inherit all Sir James's wealth and indeed was now drawing no small income.

"I am an idiot !" he cried as he paced his room. "A little more manœuvring and I'd have got her. Now she has the bit in her teeth and—bless me ! she'll be of age in less than two months. Oh, what an idiot I have been !"

He stamped his foot with rage, and then shut himself into the library for the rest of the day.

A strangely restless fit seemed on him. He felt he must be doing something, so getting out his books and papers, began going into his accounts. To his surprise, about six o'clock the door opened and his eldest son appeared.

"Walter!" he exclaimed, holding out his hand. "My dear boy, what brings you here?"

"Wanted to see you, sir," replied the young fellow, throwing himself on the sofa. "Fact is, I'm in a beastly mess, and——"

His father's brow darkened.

"No more debts, I trust?"

"Not exactly—only debts of honour. A fellow can't always win at cards, father; you don't yourself. I'd be all right, only Harrison is pressing for payment."

"Harrison? I thought I forbade you playing with him. Every one knows he cheats."

"I couldn't help it. I was pressed into it. Anyhow, I'm in for a good fifty pounds, and haven't a brass farthing to meet it."

"Well, you'll have to meet it somehow, Walter; fact is, I'm pretty well cleared out myself, and the rock I was counting on seems likely to split."

Walter sat up questioningly:

"What do you mean, sir?"

Mr. Davenant gave a forced laugh. "Oh, Gwynneth and Thorpe. I had hoped they'd



have hit it off, but the girl has cut up rough, and won't hear of it."

Walter got up and faced his father. There was a strange look on his face.

"Look here, dad," he exclaimed, "I'm not a religious chap, and don't pretend to have any goodness to boast of, but I'd rather see Gwen in her coffin than the wife of Thorpe—yes, I would!"

His father sat back in his chair, and looked him up and down.

"And when did you become Gwynneth's knight?" he asked sarcastically.

Walter coloured. "I don't pretend to be her knight—or any one else's, for the matter of that—but I know this, that you haven't an idea of what Thorpe is, or you'd never sell your only daughter to him. He's a——"

The sentence remained unfinished, for Walter walked to the fireplace, and stood gazing into the glowing embers. Neither spoke, but the lad knew by his father's silence that he was not pleased. *How* angry he was he did not guess, for to be openly defied—nay, reproved—by two of his children was more than he could stand, so when at length his son turned and asked:

"Then you can't help me, sir?" he answered curtly, "No, I can't, and I won't. You must shift for yourself."

Without a word the young man turned and left the room and the house, leaving his father to his bitter reflections. Strange that two women had loved and trusted him in the past, but the conscience of George Davenant told him that the mother of his boys lay in her grave with a broken heart. It was not a nice memory. He tried to shelve it.

Upstairs, in the sitting-room where that wife had so often sat and wept, a girl now sat bitterly weeping. That her father should have tried to make her accept the attentions of such a man as Percy Thorpe, and all for his own selfish ends, almost broke her heart. She felt as if the last link with his fatherhood had been broken, and but for the remembrance of how she had been "forgiven much," the old words she had uttered at the Wishing Well would have been repeated.

Now, as she wept in her loneliness and sorrow, Margaret's parting message came back to her—"Live looking up." Yes, that was it, she had "forgotten her resting-place." So, slipping down on her knees, she "went and told Jesus."

Gradually a great calm stole over her, and as she prayed for first Walter, and then her father, her feelings of resentment melted away, and instead came a great yearning pity, truly a God gift.

She knew nothing of the scene that had taken place in the library, of the miserable man sitting there in his self-condemnation and misery, of his erring son, who with teeth set, in bitterness of soul, was making his way through wind and rain to the railway station. But who will say that her prayers on their behalf were thrown away, or that God had forgotten them?

September had slipped away, and October had commenced. Gwynneth could not hide her eyes to the fact that her father seemed more than usually depressed and worried. One bright afternoon, early in the month, he was busy in his library over his accounts, books and money lying on his table. Gwynneth had been picking some late roses in the garden, and as she arranged them, one rose of particular beauty took her fancy, so, placing it in a specimen glass she took it to the library, thinking the little attention would please Mr. Davenant.

But he was not there, having been called off to speak to his groom a few minutes previously. Gwynneth placed the flower on the table, glancing at the money and notes, and then out of the open window to the quiet peaceful garden outside, still lit by the rays of the sinking sun.

An impulse seized her to go out into it again, for surely such days would be few now that autumn had set in, so she slipped out once more

and sat down to watch the sun sinking behind the tall pine trees.

How beautiful it all was! Oh, why did sin creep in and spoil everything? Suddenly in the dim light her attention was arrested by a figure making its way quickly across the velvet lawn. At first she thought it was one of the servants, for it seemed strangely familiar, but she saw it advance to the open window of the library, pause an instant, and then, to her surprise, vault lightly in.

A minute's pause, while the girl held her breath, and then once more the mysterious visitor appeared, coming out the way he had gone in, sped across the lawn, and was just disappearing amongst the shrubs when Gwynneth recognized him—it was Walter!

She started forward. "Walter!" she called.

For a moment he paused. "Walter!" she called again, and ran across the lawn, but with a bound he plunged into the bushes and was gone, and when Gwynneth came to the spot not a vestige of him was to be seen.

She stood panting and puzzled. She was absolutely certain it was her brother she had seen, but why had he come and disappeared in such a way? She was troubled, and began slowly pacing up and down the garden path lost in thought.

Suddenly her father's voice, sharp and clear,

calling her by name, fell on her ear, and she hastened back to the house and into the library.

The lamp had been lit, and by its light she saw he was looking agitated.

"Gwynneth," he began as she entered, "have you been in this room this afternoon?"

"Yes, father; I came in with that rose, less than half an hour ago." And she pointed to the flower on the table.

"Did you notice any money about?"

"Yes; I saw some little heaps of gold and silver on the table, by your account books, and I think there was a roll of bank-notes too. At least, it looked like notes."

"Exactly, and now they are missing."

He watched her face as he made this statement. The surprise and consternation there was genuine.

"Missing!" she exclaimed; "why, who could have taken them? Was it a large sum?"

"Fifty pounds," answered her father; "and none of the servants have been in the room, you are the only one who has entered."

He paused, still watching her narrowly. Suddenly a thought flashed into her mind. He saw her change colour and catch her breath, and then clutch the back of a chair to steady herself. Then she looked him straight in the face.

"I have been in your room, father, but I have

not touched a penny of your money," and she turned towards the door.

"Nevertheless it is gone," he remarked cruelly, and he saw her put her hand to her heart as she left the room.

No more was said, but during the days that followed Gwynneth went about feeling that her father suspected her; in his eyes she was a thief, while in her heart lay a hidden secret whispered to God alone.

How dark and desolate she felt, and then, just before the last week of October, a ray of brightness appeared, for Margaret and her husband returned from their honeymoon, and once more the girl felt the loving pressure of her friend's arms around her.

"How pale and thin you look!" exclaimed Margaret, holding her at arm's length and gazing searchingly into her face. They were alone, and Gwynneth found it hard work to restrain herself.

"Childie, you are in trouble. Ione has not been looking after you enough. I shall have to scold her. Come now, tell me all about it."

"Oh, Margaret, I cannot; don't ask me, there's a darling. It concerns others, so I must be silent," and then she crept into her friend's arms and gave way to a burst of tears.

Margaret wisely said no more, only tenderly

stroking her hair and inwardly praying for guidance and help. How greatly Gwynneth needed that help she little knew.

"There is a doctor friend of Douglas's coming to stay with us next week," she remarked. "I think I must ask him to prescribe for you! I don't like these pale cheeks and heavy eyes. I think I must ask your father to spare you to us, and let us take you back to Scotland. Have you heard that the General, and Mrs. Edgerton, and Ione are all coming to spend Christmas with us in our own house? Oh, and I had almost forgotten Ione's message. She said I was to be sure and tell you she expects you to spend your birthday with her. When is it, the 30th? Yes, that is just ten days from this, isn't it? So be sure and remember."

Gwynneth smiled and said she would not forget, and then listened while Margaret told her of the various places they had visited, and of her happiness, and all her husband's goodness to her.

"Ah, childie, it is worth while to wait God's time," she remarked, as she rose to go. "I am so glad I trusted all these years. I think it has made us love one another all the more now that God has brought us together!"

## CHAPTER XX

### SET FREE

"And now farewell! 'Tis hard to give thee up,  
With death, so like a gentle slumber, on thee  
And thy dark sin! Oh! I could drink the cup,  
If from this woe its bitterness had won thee.  
May God have called thee like a wanderer, home,  
My lost boy, Absalom!"

WILLIS.

A FEW days later Walter returned home. His time at Sandhurst was drawing to a close, and he seemed in better spirits than on his last visit. Gwynneth could not help noticing how fondly his father's eyes rested upon him as he rattled on at dinner, keeping them amused by his many stories.

He was not long in noticing his father's change of manner to Gwynneth, but put it down to the girl's dislike to Percy Thorpe, until a remark from Mr. Davenant, when they were alone after dinner, opened his eyes, and then the whole story came out.

Walter was sitting opposite his father sipping his claret, while the latter told the story of the robbery. The lad's back was half turned to-



wards the light, so his face was hidden, otherwise Mr. Davenant might have been struck with its extreme paleness. When he had finished Walter remarked slowly :

"But you don't mean to say, sir, that you think Gwynneth took that money?"

"I certainly do. Everything points that way. By her own confession she had been in my room, and was able to tell me there was gold, silver, and notes on my table. I know none of the servants had entered."

"Are you sure no one else entered the room?" His voice was low and constrained.

"Positive. Of course, she denies it; but there it lies, and until I find out to the contrary, I shall always consider Gwynneth is the culprit."

Walter gave a low whistle as he rose from the table.

"Awfully hard lines on Gwynneth," he remarked.

The following day he was moody and pre-occupied, and unable to settle to anything, spending his time gazing out of the window at the dripping trees and shrubs, for the weather had changed, and for three days heavy rain had fallen without ceasing.

Finally, he had put on his waterproof and sallied forth, only to grumble still more on his return at the state of the roads, and saying the

Eddle was much swollen and rushing madly through the meadows.

Gwynneth watched him wistfully, and more than once caught his eye ; but he always seemed to avoid her, and she more than ever had resort to prayer. She knew he would be leaving for Sandhurst the next day, and her heart ached over him.

What was her surprise, then, at hearing a knock at her door the afternoon of the day previous to his departure, and the next instant Walter walked in.

For a moment his eye wandered round the room, his mother's room, which he had not entered since her death over four years previously ; then he saw Gwynneth sitting working by the fire, and almost imagined it was his mother who smiled up at him and bid him welcome.

He entered, and threw himself on the sofa.

"Beastly weather !" he exclaimed ; but there was a tone in his voice which did not escape his sister's watchful ear.

"So you have come up here to cheer me up, and get a cup of tea," she remarked. "Very nice of you ; see, here it comes."

At that moment Nancy appeared with the tea-tray.

"I saw Master Walter come up, miss, so I've

brought an extra cup," observed the maid, and was rewarded by the smile and thanks of her young mistress.

When they were alone Gwynneth proceeded to pour out the tea, brought over a cup to her brother, placing it on a stool by his side, and then handed him the buttered toast. He watched her every movement. Something seemed to fascinate him. Was it the memory of his dead mother, or the recollection of a great wrong which lay on his heart, and for which his sister was suffering, that softened him so this afternoon? He laid down his cup at last, and pushing away the stool, threw himself back on the sofa, while Gwynneth once more took up the warm shawl she was crocheting as a Christmas gift for Matti. There was silence for a time, and then he asked suddenly :

"I say, Gwynneth, don't you hate me?"

She laid down her work and gazed at him. The suddenness of the question, and such an unlikely one, falling from *his* lips, took her by surprise.

"Hate you, Walter? No, indeed. Why, you are my brother."

"True, but plenty of brothers and sisters hate each other. Come now, honour bright, haven't I often given you good reason to hate me?"

Her head was bent low over her work, and he

could not see her face ; then she raised it, and the firelight lit it up, and it seemed to Walter as if he saw the face of an angel.

"Perhaps I might have hated you, Walter," she said softly, "only nearly a year ago something happened. There was One Whom I had wronged deeply, Whose offers of love and forgiveness I had set aside, and yet He kept on loving me, and at last I yielded to His claims. Since then, everything has been different, and it has not been hard to love and forgive since I have learned how much Jesus has forgiven me."

Walter sat up. His face was strangely moved.

"Gwynneth," he remarked, "I tell you what—I believe in your religion. I know I'm a cad—you know what I've done, or at least part of it, but"—and his voice grew husky—"God knows I wish I were different."

He buried his face in his hands. Gwynneth threw aside her work and came and knelt beside him.

"Poor old boy," she whispered. "I'm so awfully sorry for you. You must begin again."

He shook his head sadly.

"It's too late ; you don't know what a horrid mess I'm in."

"No, but Christ does ; and if you'll trust Him, He will help you out of it all. Oh, Walter, do begin again !"

Again he shook his head. Gwynneth did not know what to say, but suddenly the words of a poem she had once learned flashed into her mind, and she began repeating them in a low voice :

“ Oh, to go back across the years long vanished,  
To have the words unsaid, the deeds undone,  
The errors cancelled, the dark shadows banished  
In the glad sense of a new world begun.  
To be a little child whose page of story  
Is yet undimmed, unblotted by a stain,  
And in the ages of primeval glory  
To feel that life has had its start again.”

Walter was visibly moved. She felt his sobs choking him. Then she continued :

“ I may go back across the years long vanished,  
I may resume my childhood, Lord, in Thee,  
When in the shadow of Thy Cross are banished  
All other shadows that encircle me,  
And on this path, which now is dark and dreary,  
This soul made buoyant by a sense of rest,  
Shall run untired, shall walk and not be weary,  
To bear the blessing that has made it blessed.”

The lad's head was buried in the sofa cushions ; he did not try now to hide his feelings. Gwynneth put her arm round him.

“ I don't know what's come over me ! ” he exclaimed, and then gave way to another burst of grief.

“ God has come over you, Walter dear,”

whispered Gwynneth. "Oh, my brother, do yield to Him and begin again, do—do!"

"How can I, Gwynneth? Everything's against me. Since my mother died four years ago I've not had a soul to help me keep straight. How well I remember her talking to me in this very room—you remind me of her—and I did want then to grow up steady and good. But circumstances were too strong for me. I've never had a friend to help me up, don't know a single chap to give me a helping hand!"

He threw himself back once more; but a sudden inspiration seized Gwynneth.

"Walter," she exclaimed earnestly, "*I* know some one who will gladly be a friend to you and help you. Will you let him? Douglas Edgerton."

"Douglas Edgerton? Why, he's miles away, in Italy or Scotland, or some such place. I want some one at hand."

"No, he's not miles away. He and Margaret returned from their honeymoon a few days ago, and for the next fortnight are at the General's. Oh, Walter, do go to him! He is a good man, and I know would help you."

He could not resist her pleading, and rose wearily. She got up too.

"You will! I know you will! I see it in your face! Come, you'll go now."

She linked her arm in his, and together they descended the wide oak staircase into the hall, where she helped him into his overcoat and got his hat. He let her do it all; then, with his hand on the door-handle, he turned and faced her.

"Do you forgive me, Gwynneth?"

"Forgive you? Why, of course, freely and fully. No one shall ever hear from me, if I can help it, of—of—what you did. Of course, you will make it good to father, but go now and get all the help you can. I shall be praying, oh, so hard for you. When we meet again all these wrinkles must be gone, and you are to have a new face!"

She laughed and gently smoothed his forehead with her soft hand; then a sudden impulse seized her, and she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"God bless you, my dear, dear brother," she said, then gently opening the door, pushed him out into the darkness. But when he had gone down the drive Walter found a tear on his cheek. He was deeply touched and softened, and hardly heeded the driving rain and wind which beat so mercilessly in his face. On, on he pressed, until General Edgerton's house was reached and he found himself in the cosy study.

Captain Edgerton rose as he entered and threw down the paper he was reading.

"Davenant!" he exclaimed; "and on such a night! My dear fellow, you must be soaked."

"No, I'm not; I had on my waterproof coat."

Something in his manner struck Douglas, and he drew a chair to the fire and pointed to it.

"Sit down, and tell me what brought you here, and in such weather."

Walter glanced at the bright manly face at his side; he felt he could trust this man.

"My sister sent me," he said quietly. "I'm in trouble, and she thought you—you—could help me, sir."

For answer the Captain put out his hand and grasped the lad's.

"Ah—I see, I'm glad you came. Now will you trust me, and I'll promise to do all I can for you?"

"Yes, sir, I will."

And then Walter began, and poured out such a history, that even Douglas, who knew something of the young man's past doings, could hardly credit it. He touched lightly on the sins of others who had helped drag him into the mire; but the older man could not help seeing how deeply his father was to blame, and how by example and indulgence he had helped to ruin his son. Walter hid nothing, not even his theft, and was loud in his praise of his sister's conduct in never having told of him.

Douglas Edgerton never said a word, but sat



looking into the fire; only his alert expression told that not a word was lost.

At last Walter ceased speaking, and a silence fell, which lasted so long that he grew uneasy. He did not know his friend was praying for guidance all the time.

"Can you help me, sir?" at length he ventured to ask.

"No," was the sudden reply. Then Douglas turned with a smile and held out his hand once more.

"No, Walter, *I* cannot help you, but I know One Who can. I could help you with money and advice, but you want more than this—you are morally wrong, bad inside—'your heart is not right in the sight of God.' Now I cannot touch *that*, but I can point you to the One Who can not only forgive and cleanse you, but also 'put into your mind good desires, and by His continual help enable you to bring the same to good effect.' Oh, my dear lad, *that* is a Saviour worth having! Think of it—'able to save to the uttermost'—isn't it wonderful? Now the question is, will you have Him, yield to His claim, give up your life of sin, get right with God, and begin again? Will you?"

Walter was silent. Gradually the light was dawning; then he put his hand into the Captain's and said, "By God's grace—I will."

They knelt together, these two men—let us leave them alone with God.

When, an hour later, Walter stood in the hall bidding farewell, he had in his pocket a cheque for £100. He was to pay it back gradually, and had promised to make a clean confession to his father, thus clearing Gwynneth; he also had promised never to touch cards again.

The wrinkles were gone from his brow, and the light of a steady purpose shone in his eye as he grasped Douglas' hand.

"I can never thank you enough, sir. Some day I hope it may be in my power to prove how grateful I am."

"All right, Davenant. Only remember we are brothers in Christ. I shall expect you to confide in me, and look to me for help, should you need it. God bless you. Keep looking to the Captain. He will hold you fast."

They parted, and the lad stepped out into the rain once more. The wind had risen, and it was blowing a gale; but what cared he—had he not been to the Cross, and was he not tasting the sweetness of forgiven sin?

When he got into the high road he paused. If he went round by the road it would mean a good two-mile walk, if by the fields little over half a mile. He turned it over in his mind, and then being anxious to get home as speedily as

possible, chose the latter, and started across the swampy sodden field track.

It was very dark, but he found his way all right until he reached the bridge; then the roaring of the swollen river arrested him. The water was just up to the bridge; a little more, and it would be over it. Should he—dare he venture? Cautiously groping his way, he caught hold of the rail, and began the perilous crossing. All went well until he reached the middle, when suddenly there was a violent shock, as an uprooted tree, borne along by the seething current, came in contact with the fragile structure, and the next instant the lad was being borne away by the rushing tide.

. . . . .

“Where is Walter?” asked his father, as he sat down to dinner a little later.

“He is out, father,” replied Gwynneth, and no more was said; but when the hours passed on and he did not return, Gwynneth grew anxious and felt vexed her father took it so lightly, saying he was probably spending the evening with friends.

But Gwynneth knew where he had gone, and a haunting dread seized her that something had happened to him, as she listened to the howling wind and rain.

## CHAPTER XXI

### BEGINNING AGAIN

"God sends from out of the deep and says—  
    'I gave thee the great gifts of Life;  
Wast thou not called in many ways?  
    Are not My earth and heaven at strife?  
I gave thee of My seed to sow—  
    Bringest thou Me thy hundred-fold?'  
Can I look up with face aglow,  
    And answer—'Father, here is gold?'"

LOWELL.

"FATHER, Walter has not been home all night!"

It was Gwynneth who spoke. She had entered the library, where her father sat after breakfast, engrossed in his letters and papers.

He was sitting at his table, an open letter before him, and he took no heed of her remark.

She repeated it. Still no answer, so she touched his arm and started, as he raised a white, drawn face to hers.

"Eh, what, child? Walter not returned? That's nothing new. He's all right. Run away now, I can't be disturbed."

He returned to his letters, and with a sigh Gwynneth left the room.

Under ordinary circumstances she would not have been uneasy, but after what had taken place the previous afternoon, she somehow felt that he had not gone back to his old haunts. She was just on the point of putting on her things and setting out for General Edgerton's, for the morning was bright and sunny, when she was arrested by hearing footsteps on the gravel outside, and, glancing through the window, saw a group of men carrying something on a gate. Her heart stood still, then she dashed into the hall just as the butler opened the door.

One glance was enough. Yes, it was Walter. Then her thoughts turned to the man in the library.

"Austin," she said, addressing the butler in hurried tones, "tell them where to put him, send at once for the doctor, call Mrs. Richardson. I must go to my father," and she slipped away to his room.

He was sitting as she had left him, only if possible more engrossed than ever in the letter before him. She put her hand on his arm.

"Father, dear father," she began, "Walter has—is——"

"Walter again!" he exclaimed petulantly. "Run away, Gwynneth, I can't be disturbed."

"But you *must* listen!" she cried. "Oh, father, there has been an accident, they have

brought him home—and, oh, do come out, please ! ”

The agony in her voice startled him, and he sprang to his feet.

“Walter hurt ! An accident ! What has happened ? He is not—not—dead ? ”

Her face was deathly pale. One glance at it, and then with a cry he fell at her feet.

What followed seemed all like a horrible dream. Gwynneth was dimly conscious of Mrs. Richardson and the butler appearing on the scene, and her father being laid on the sofa. Then came the doctor’s visit, who looked grave and intimated a stroke, of hushed voices when Walter’s name was mentioned, and then of her stealing into his room and seeing him lying white and still on the bed, with a look of such calm peace on his face and “a light that never shone on land or sea” lighting it up. No wrinkles there now. After that there seemed a blank, and she only woke to find herself in her own bed, with Margaret sitting by her side.

“Where am I ? What has happened ? ” asked the girl feebly.

Margaret’s arm was round her instantly. “Hush, my darling ! Lie still and rest. Don’t think about anything yet.”

And Gwynneth tried to obey, but gradually everything came back to her with a sickening

sense of pain and loss, and she wept long and quietly. It did her good, and then Margaret let her talk a little, and began softly to answer her questions. Two days had gone by since the accident, and her father had regained consciousness, but was still speechless, and one side was paralysed. Later on it was found he had received letters that morning telling of heavy mining losses, and this, with the loss of his son, had made him what he was. Captain Edgerton, having been the last to see Walter, had been called upon to give evidence, and had proved most useful in many ways. Indeed, on the days following, Gwynneth did not know what they would have done without him. It was he who arranged with Mr. Davenant's lawyer about the funeral, and attended as chief mourner with Hugh, who had been summoned from school. The boy was very much broken down, and clung to the Captain, who related to him the details of his brother's death and of all that had taken place previously.

Gradually Gwynneth was allowed to sit up, and then, on her birthday, she was placed on the couch in the little sitting-room, and Hugh and Margaret waited on her. The shock had been great, but when she heard from Douglas Edgerton of her brother's visit and its results her eyes shone, and new life seemed to come to her.

That afternoon she fell asleep, and Margaret crept away, while another visitor entered the room and sat quietly by the fire, waiting until she should wake.

By and by she opened her eyes and sat up. "Is that you, Hugh?" she asked.

For answer her visitor arose, and by the fire-light Gwynneth at first thought he was a stranger; then with a cry she tried to rise.

"Oh, Evan! Evan! have you come at last?" she cried, and held out both her hands.

He took them and seated himself on the sofa beside her.

"Yes, I have come," he said. "I promised you should see me when you were twenty-one, and I have kept my word. Have you wanted me, Gwynneth?"

She looked at him wistfully. "More than I can ever tell you," she said.

"And I have wanted you, *merch i*, oh, so badly, more than ever I can tell you! Wanted you in the long winter evenings, when I sat by my lonely fireside and thought of Aunt Mary and the past; wanted you in the summer days, when I went sailing out over the dancing waves; wanted you always and everywhere. Gwynneth, will you come home with me?"

And Gwynneth whispered "Yes."

. . . . .



A year has passed, and in the bow window of her cottage home sits Gwynneth. There is a chastened look in her face and a seriousness round her sweet lips, as she gazes out on the sea, where the waves are dashing in wild grandeur against the dark rocks. In her hand she holds a letter; it is from Ione, and tells of the birth of her first little nephew, and the rejoicing his advent has occasioned. Also, that her first book had been published, and she was sending her a copy. But there is another piece of news, too—Ione is engaged to be married, and her future husband is Dr. Trent. She is very happy, and her gladness infects Gwynneth. Presently she rises and goes over to the sofa upon which lies a quiet form. Few looking at the wasted figure and altered features would have recognized the once strong build of George Davenant. Yet it is he; changed, it is true, but able to speak in slow, hesitating tones, and with a rest upon his brow which was not there in the old days. Gwynneth is the light of his eyes, he can scarcely bear her out of his sight; and he has also learned to love and trust Gwynneth's husband, his son-in-law, now for the last six months.

Such a quiet little wedding as it was at St. Patrick's Church; no one present that fair spring morning when the doctor and his bride

walked quietly out of the house and across the dewy fields to be made man and wife, except Matti and Hugh, the latter giving his sister away. There had been no honeymoon, for how could Gwynneth leave her father, who called for her every hour of the day ? But they did not need it ; it seemed so natural to take up the thread of life in the old home, and begin again !

Gwynneth had learned many things since her return to Cemaes. How the doctor had lived with Matti in the cottage from the day she left, looking after everything, and letting nothing be altered. " We'll keep everything just as it is, till she comes back," he had said to Matti, and so it had been.

Then he had set about enlarging the cottage, throwing out a wing, and thus making two more bedrooms and an extra sitting-room. When they were built he had covered them with creepers, so the addition did not look new and ugly.

It had required no persuasion to bring Mr. Davenant to his daughter's home. At that time he took an interest in nothing, and Evan Hughes and the family lawyer had had to see to all his affairs, which were in a terrible condition.

Oaklands, with all it contained, had been sold to meet the demands of his creditors, the contents of Gwynneth's two rooms alone being

saved, as he had given them to her as a gift previously. When everything was wound up, his liabilities were only just met, even the insurance money on Walter's life being swallowed up.

Happily Mr. Davenant's own life was heavily insured, and this was all Hugh had to look forward to out of his father's and mother's fortunes.

He was now a well-grown lad of nearly sixteen, and on the eve of entering on his career as a civil engineer, having staunch friends both in his brother-in-law Evan, and also in Captain Edgerton. The latter had told him all his brother's history, and though it caused him deep grief, it had the good effect of making him abhor the things which had caused his brother's downfall, and cards, wine, and gambling were never indulged in by him. Also, Douglas had good reason to know that the boy had also turned towards the Saviour Walter had found just before his death.

After it became known that Mr. Davenant had lost all his money, Percy Thorpe never troubled Gwynneth again, and she heard, to her great sorrow, that when he returned to India, he took with him as his wife Eva Stenton. Gwynneth had so hoped this girl might have been saved from the downward path upon which she stood ; but she deliberately chose the world, and lived to rue the day she ever met her hus-

band. Little Robin was left with Lady Farrant, and became the spoilt pet and autocrat of her house. As his father died before he grew up, he came in for Sir James's wealth in his place.

When the establishment at Oaklands was broken up, and Mrs. Richardson and the servants had to seek new places, there was one who stoutly refused to leave Gwynneth, and begged with tears that she might be allowed to accompany her. This was Nancy, who, ever since the day she had induced her young mistress in her distress to see Margaret Elston, had regarded her with special interest, which had deepened into love, when one day Gwynneth had remarked shyly : " Nancy, I can never be thankful enough that you brought Miss Margaret over to see me. That was a turning-point in my life. I found Jesus, and you helped me to find Him."

The maid's eyes had filled with tears, and so the link between them had been riveted.

So Nancy and Matti reigned together, and before long managed to get along pretty well, by each learning to bear and forbear. Thus the household peace was kept, much to Gwynneth's satisfaction, who dreaded nothing so much as " rows."

Irene still held Margaret's class together ; but Margaret had hinted in one of her letters that when once Ione was married she expected

the General and his wife would come and live near them, as they said they would be so lonely without their children.

It was a sweet, calm evening, and as her father was both peaceful and content, Gwynneth hailed with pleasure her husband's proposal that, as he had an hour to spare, they should go out for a stroll.

Throwing a shawl over her shoulders, she quickly followed him into the little garden, and together they climbed the steep cliff-side, and instinctively made their way towards St. Patrick's.

How still and beautiful everything looked, with the sun sinking into the sea like a ball of fire; truly an ideal October evening!

They talked of many things, going over the past, and "remembering all the way the Lord their God had led them."

And then as they stood on the rocks by the Wishing Well, Gwynneth told her husband the story of her wish, and how God had dealt with her.

He seemed much moved. "I think God has given you your revenge, dear heart," he remarked, "though not in the way you expected, but in the way the Master would have taken it, and the poor father's life seems at last to be ending in peace."

"Yes, and this lovely calm evening seems just like my life after the storms and quicksands of the last two years. I seem to have lived a lifetime, Evan, so much has been crowded into it, and I had truly come to my wits' end when you appeared."

"God lives at Wits' End, my darling. How often we have proved it. And for all He has done for us, shall we not trust Him more, for truly we have proved 'not one word hath failed of all His good promise, all has come to pass.'"

THE END

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